

Harry Potter And The Summer Of Change

1. 'Home' Again

The sunlight was warm on his face and the heat of the quickly fading day perked up his hope that this summer would be different than all the others. His relatives, if you could call them that, had just been warned by Moody, Lupin, Mr. Weasley, and Tonks to be nice to him. The aforementioned relatives were following in his wake to the car. Harry looked to either side of the nearest car park and realised that he didn't know where the car was and he was unlikely to find it without some direction. For all he knew, Vernon could have gotten a new one while he was away at Hogwarts trying to stay alive. *'Or getting others killed. Or risking the lives of my friends.'*

Harry had goals for the summer. He hoped they were simple enough since he had just formulated them on the train ride south.

1. Stay Alive
2. Protect Your Mind
3. Take Control Of Your Life
4. Get Information
5. Keep Your Loved Ones Safe
6. Learn How To Win

The list wasn't in any particular order, but he needed to achieve all of them. Failure would only lead to someone else's death. He would be lucky if his was the only death that came from a failure. At least then he wouldn't have the guilt he was dealing with at the moment. Sirius was his fault. He had failed to save him. More over, he had led Sirius to his own death. He'd had a chance to save him in the chamber, but he had just stood and watched. And then when he'd had the chance, he couldn't even avenge his godfather's death properly. *'I will not be useless next time,'* Harry thought to himself while trying to cope with the anguish and frustration he was feeling.

He had failed on so many levels this year; Umbridge being only one of them. The list could take up rolls of parchment. *'I have to succeed. I have to win. I have to...to find my bloody 'family','* Harry thought, as he realised he was alone in the crowd on the street outside King's Cross Station.

A quick scan of the throngs of people showed him two lumbering masses making their way to a car park across the road. With a deep breath and a tight grip on his trolley, Harry made to follow the dreadful people he stayed with during holiday break.

'Remember, Harry, they are on notice to treat you well. They will be better. They won't be the same.'

Harry dodged a Renault that accelerated past him to make a turn. Remembering the basic lessons of childhood Harry thought, *'avoid Dudley and his friends if you can, if you can't you are faster than them, and look both ways before crossing the road because Dudley will push you in front of traffic given the chance.'* Navigating the hazards of London's city streets as well as he could, Harry reached the car and knocked on the boot so his Uncle would release the latch. Ten seconds went by before the boot popped open with a metallic click. The 'relatives', as Harry planned to call them for the duration of his sentence, were seated in the car with Dudley behind his father and Petunia in the front seat.

As Harry hefted his trunk off the trolley and into the boot, he noticed that the car leaned heavily to one side. Laughter welled up in his mind as Harry figured out the cause of the lopsided vehicle. *'I wonder how often the car will try to make right turns on its own.'* Hedwig would be riding inside with Harry. That situation was not debatable. She deserved better, but an owl in a cage was 'abnormal' enough. No need to push it by releasing her in front of the evening commuters.

Harry closed the boot and slid into the back seat. Dudley, taking up nearly two thirds of the backseat alone, tried to distance himself from Harry as much as possible but failed miserably in his efforts. Vernon barely flinched at the quiet hoot Hedwig made when the car was backed out of the space abruptly still listing to the right.

Harry watched Vernon carefully, keeping his humorous observations to himself. The next two hours would set the terms for the summer. Vernon looked straight ahead as he aimed the auto through the congested streets. He was still white-faced. He hadn't come to terms with the warning yet. He hadn't made his decision to listen to it or

fight it. Harry decided it was a very volatile situation as far as his Uncle was concerned.

Shifting his eyes left led him to Aunt Petunia sitting straight-backed in her seat. She only looked backwards quickly enough to reassure herself that Dudley was the same beached whale he always was and hadn't been '*changed*' by any of Harry's magic. She paid Harry no mind as far as he could tell but something somehow was different all the same.

Dudley kept his maw fixedly pointed out the window. He never turned his head nor asked any questions. Harry was reminded of a saying he'd heard once. "See no evil, Hear no evil, Speak no evil." Only in this situation it would be, "See no Harry, Hear no Harry, Speak no Harry."

'This I can handle,' Harry said to himself. *'I can live with this. Silence would be good for a summer.'* It didn't last long.

About every half hour, Harry noticed that Vernon was changing colours. At first it seemed like the twins might have slipped him something, but an hour into the ride 'home' Harry knew it was a normal Vernon reaction coming out. His face was a shade of white, then normal colour followed by a pinkish-red. Only one colour remained and they had less than twenty minutes left to the trip.

'Same pinkish-red,' Harry noted as they pulled into the driveway of Number Four, Privet Drive. *'I might just make it to bed before he snaps.'*

The car was switched off, the boot was popped, and the Dursleys exited the car as swiftly as possible. Harry slid out of his seat and closed the door. The locks snapped closed and the interior light was extinguished letting him take note of the darkening sky. Harry went to the rear of the car and pulled his trunk out of the boot before closing it sharply. He gripped Hedwig's cage in his left hand and the trunk in his right and headed towards the front door.

'Well, let's get this over with, eh.'

Harry closed the front door with his foot while balancing his weight carefully on the remaining foot. The Dursleys were in the living room judging by the lights that were on in the house. A faint bluish flicker and the noise droning on from the room most likely to house Dudley when he was awake was proof enough.

'So far, so good.' Harry set his trunk down and quickly carried Hedwig up to his room. He opened the window, glad that it hadn't been nailed shut, and opened the door to the cage telling Hedwig to help herself. He returned to the entryway and grabbed his trunk planning on repeating his quick escape from his 'relatives'.

Unfortunately, he felt a presence behind him. It wasn't the same feeling he got around Voldemort or the Death Eaters. It was similar to slipping on black ice and catching yourself rather than the empty feeling of being halfway to the ground after your feet leave the earth. Harry spun around smoothly and was met by Vernon's hand on his throat lifting him slightly off the floor. An errant thought ran through his mind, *'Things were too good to be true.'*

"Thought that was funny, didn't you, boy?" Vernon hissed, spraying spittle on Harry. "Thought your freaky friends could scare me, eh? Had a good laugh you did. Well, now it is time to pay up, boy."

Vernon swung a fist into Harry's gut at that moment. Harry doubled over as the air was pushed from his body by the force of the blow. Things went white and a burning sensation flared in his lungs. Things were definitely not going well this summer. Another swing and Harry saw stars in addition to his white, hazy vision.

Letting his instincts take over, Harry kicked out his foot and caught Vernon in a very advantageous spot. He felt himself being dropped and ended up striking his head on the banister and collapsed into his trunk on the floor. Neither object moved enough to save Harry from additional injuries. *'Bloody hell. Another, normal, summer at the Dursleys', but I have my list of things to achieve and I'm not going to fail. I can't.'*

Harry regained his vision and footing before Vernon could gather himself for another attack. Harry fingered his wand as he looked at the Dursleys and scowled. *'The poster family for pathetic Muggles'*

according to Voldemort,' Harry thought. 'This is not going to happen. I'm better than this. I've had enough abuse in my life and I'm not going to let these people continue it.'

"Not this time, Uncle," Harry said coldly. "I will not be beaten by you or anyone. I have had enough of the pain."

Harry noticed the vision in his left eye take on a slightly reddish tint. With a sigh and a swipe of his hand, Harry found blood running down his face. "Always bleeding. I'm tired of this."

Vernon regained his footing and stood in front of his wife and 'child'. The purple colour had finally found its way onto his face. The bulging vein in his forehead was pumping away. His fists were clenched and he was ready to throttle Harry. He made to charge but paused when he saw the look on Harry's face. It was one of resolute defiance. The smeared blood added to the look, too. This boy wasn't scared. He wasn't cowering. He was standing on his own feet, relaxed, accepting, and waiting.

"Think this is over, Boy?" Vernon snarled trying to change the feel of the situation. "I will beat the magic out of you this time."

"I doubt that very much, Tubby," said a voice from the doorway.

Harry spun around with wand in hand, as he was prepared to fight Vernon, training it on the new target. He paused for a second slowly recognizing the spiky red hair and heart-shaped face of the clumsy Auror before turning the wand back on Vernon.

"Tonks," Harry said pleasantly, not showing any effect of the current situation. "Nice of you to stop by. Care for some tea, maybe some Dursley-abuse while it steeps?"

"Thanks for your offer, Harry," Tonks said cheerily. "But I think the Ministry might frown on that, considering."

"I won't say a word, Tonks," Harry returned. "I was just thinking of what curse to use myself. Surely, there are laws permitting me to save myself from assault by animal life. At least one law that says I

can protect myself from 'them'?" Harry commented casually tilting his wand in Vernon's direction.

"Maybe one or two, Harry," Tonks smiled as she took in the situation. "I have a few laws that I could enforce right now as well. I saw you attack Harry, Muggle. Apparently our warning did little to impress upon you the seriousness of... Oh, to hell with the legal crap. Listen you fecking tub of lard. I should curse your whole family to within an inch of their lives for hurting Harry. I might just do it anyway. But if you touch him again I will hurt you. I will hurt you really badly."

"Dumbledore will not..." came a squeak from Aunt Petunia.

"Dumbledore won't know about it, Horsy," snapped Tonks, her eyes blazing in the dim light of the entranceway. "I am an Auror, Scotland Yard to you, and do you think anybody would bother after they heard what you did to Harry?"

"He is a nothing of a boy," Vernon yelled for the first time. "He is nothing but a piece of..."

"He is ten times the man you could ever hope to become, Dursley," Tonks replied forcefully. "Harry is the kind of man everyone wants as their son or son-in-law, but you are too blind to see it, bastard."

Harry kept his wand pointed at Vernon, but looked at Tonks. This was the first time, ever, anyone had stood up for him inside the walls of Number Four. He thought about what he could do to salvage the whole night from Vernon yelling at him or worse once Tonks left. According to Dumbledore - a small nugget of anger burned in him as he remembered what happened in his office - he had to stay here. He was protected here. He needed to think about that. How could it still work? Voldemort used his blood when he came back. Movement brought reality to the forefront and pushed the wondering to the rear.

Tonks moved to the side of Harry. She looked sideways and saw the blood trickling from his head. His hair was becoming matted down from the liquid. His eyes were glaring at the Muggles. His wand was steady and ready to strike. He handled things better than most. He knew who he was and how to take care of himself one way or another at least.

“Harry,” Tonks prompted, “did you lose consciousness?”

“Nope, just fog and stars,” Harry answered. “No big deal. I’ve had worse from falling down.”

“At least your sense of humour isn’t damaged,” Tonks quipped. “Now, stupid Muggle family, that is you by the way, you are on official notice. If I hear or see anything like this again, you will all spend some time in Azkaban. That is our prison if you didn’t know. You assaulted your nephew, who happens to be Harry Potter no less. For that, you would get no leniency from our courts. Now, I am going to take Harry upstairs and heal his cuts and make sure you leave him alone. Any problems with that?”

“I will not have a trollop like you in my house,” Vernon yelled again.

Harry stepped forward and in front of Tonks. “Watch your words, Uncle. She happens to be my friend and I will defend her or her honour if need be.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Tonks said playfully. “I appreciate the offer, but this pillock here isn’t that big of a deal to me. I have been called worse.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Harry said quietly, while staring his uncle down. “He won’t make the same mistake again, will you, Vernon.” *‘I will not let him threaten me anymore. I will not let him threaten my friends. I will not be threatened any more by anyone. I will take control of my life right now. I will fight the fights that need fighting. I have lived by determination so far and I will keep it up. You will not beat me Voldemort. I will not be beaten. I start my war right now. Start small, then go big.’*

Vernon Dursley was mad, very mad. He wanted to kill his worthless nephew. He wanted to crush him like he should have when he was a little brat. Now though, he stared down two wands being held by a trampy little floozy and that same nephew. The only thing stopping him, really, was the look in the boy’s eyes. It was different than before. It was dangerous. The kind of look you see before a dog attacks. It was unsettling at the very least. Something had changed in the last year. The boy was not sad, scared, or depressed this time. He was

sharp. He was menacing. He was intimidating, frightfully intimidating. The night had gone terribly wrong and it had all started when they had seen Harry.

"This is still my house," Vernon tried to change the subject. It was his house; they were 'guests', right? "I will speak as I wish in my own house." As he finished his words, he saw a flash of faint light flare around his nephew. *'Oh shite, can this get any worse?'*

Tonks felt a burst of magic, it was unfocused, but it was there. She looked at Harry and saw his aura. It was greenish-blue and it had ripples flowing through it. An aura from a fifteen-year-old kid? Most people never managed a visible aura at any time during their life, let alone at fifteen. She had to rethink her opinion of Harry. 'Kid' didn't fit any longer. He had been through too much for that. He had a visible aura and it was still showing.

"Your house or not, you will watch your mouth, Uncle," Harry said sternly. "You know nothing about her and you will not speak about her like that. Now, I am going up to my room. Hopefully, we can move past what happened here tonight. I assure you I will remember it though. Tonks?"

Harry returned his wand to his back pocket and grabbed his trunk. He started up the stairs to his room. *'One foot in front of the other. Keep your eyes open. Fight the grey cloud. Stay strong or this will all be for nothing. One lesson I learned from Voldemort: always make a grand entrance or exit as it keeps the cattle impressed.'*

Tonks felt more than saw Harry turn and make his way up the stairs. She also felt his aura flicker, badly. She looked the Dursleys up and down. "Have a pleasant night, Muggles," she said with an air of intimidation, to her words and hurried up the stairs after Harry. She found him at the top staggering slightly with the fingertips of his empty hand running along the wall. He stepped into his room stiffly and released his trunk as quickly as he could, letting it drop to the floor with a thud that rattled the contents of the small room. He took one more step before roughly falling onto his dilapidated bed. Tonks entered the room and closed the door.

'Bloody hell, he passed out. He must have got a harder hit than I thought. Well, first aid training here we go.' With a few flicks of her wand, she healed the cut on his head and reduced the swelling of the knot at the base of his skull. She discovered he had a slight concussion, but it was minor and would heal by itself. She remembered hearing from Moony that Harry hated hospitals. Something he shared with his father, according to the stories. *'Probably some macho thing.'*

Harry didn't move from the place where he collapsed. Tonks found herself in an odd position. Harry Potter was unconscious in front of her, and she was supposed to be on guard duty protecting the house. *'I protect Harry, not the house. Definitely not the Muggles.'* Mind made up, she levitated him into the air, rolled him over, and lightly set him on the bed properly. She removed his shoes, noting that they desperately needed to be replaced.

As she looked him over, she saw that all of his clothes needed replacing as well. *'How could Harry Potter wear clothes like these? They are even worse than what can be found at the goodwill. He is Harry Fecking Potter for Merlin's sake and he looks like a street rat. He has money; I know the Potters were a wealthy family. Doesn't he care? Doesn't he know about his financial situation? Doesn't he...'*

"Fucking Dursleys, no doubt," Tonks said venomously. "They're the real reason." She looked around the room. It was tiny and cramped. Just her presence seemed to make the room bulge at the seams. She didn't want to know what it would look like if someone decided to add more furniture. "The best way to protect you is to watch you. The greatest danger you have are from the people downstairs, Harry. The Death Eaters are secondary, at best, for now. I will stay until the morning then I will see what can be done." Tonks's eyes searched Harry's form as she tried to decide what to do in the morning about everything that had happened.

"Don't bother," came a muffled reply. "No one cares. I am out of sight here and everyone figures I am safe from Voldemort. There aren't any other dangers, right?" Harry had lifted his head slightly and a smirk was visible. "Dumbledore just wants his weapon and the Order just wants me to be quiet and leave them alone. I am a mushroom as

far as most are concerned. Keep me in the dark and the bullshit coming.” Harry wavered for a moment before continuing. “No more, Tonks. I need to be ready. Can you help me? Sirius died because I didn’t know things. Sirius died because I couldn’t do things right. Sirius died because of me.”

“Harry!” Tonks couldn’t believe what Harry was saying. He wasn’t completely with it at the moment. He was saying things that he normally wouldn’t or shouldn’t, but he knew things most didn’t. “Sirius died because he got cocky. He taunted Bellatrix and she beat him. If you learn anything from that terrible night, learn never to hesitate in a fight. Fight it to the end and be done with it. Gloat, taunt, sulk, and cry later. Worry about things after the fact, never during. I have seen too many people die from getting that process mixed up. Now, what do you mean about a weapon?”

“The weapon against Voldemort,” Harry said oblivious to Tonks’s slight jump at the name. “Keep me alive so I can kill the bastard later. No one ever bothered to ask if I care about winning. There’s only so much a person can take before they give up.”

Tonks was beside herself. Not only by what Harry said, which was nearly earth shattering if it were true, but how he said it. The matter-of-fact way he spoke of Voldemort and death really unnerved her. “Do you care about winning?”

“Yep,” Harry said, groggily forcing the words out. “I have to, but you’re the first to ask me. If I fail, everyone dies. Everyone I care about will be killed. I can’t lose. I made myself a promise to win. I can’t afford to lose. I...just...sleepy...night.”

Tonks watched as Harry fell asleep. She had learned more in the few minutes listening to Harry ramble on than she had in all of the Order meetings over the last year. He had said some things that made sense. Actually, all of it made sense really. She had heard the term ‘weapon’ before but nothing specific about what it was. She had never heard of anyone, other than Moony, talk about Harry as a person or his feelings. Molly was different though, she reflected. Molly wanted to coddle him. Wrap him in cotton and stick him away in a closet for safe keeping so he wouldn’t get hurt.

“Oh, Harry,” Tonks mourned, “what has happened to you? What is going to happen?” She looked around the room thinking what she could do. Many things came to mind, some good, some bad, some just not appropriate to think. “I will help you, Harry. That is my promise to you. I will help you somehow.”

Tonks covered Harry in a blanket and conjured herself a chair and pillow. She tried to get comfortable over the next ten minutes but failed. Huffing, she stood up and vanished the chair. “Well, what the hell.” She expanded the bed and lay down next to Harry. She covered herself with the blanket and settled in for the next eight hours before she would be relieved. She set her wand to wake her up a few minutes early.

As she began to drift off, Harry rolled over slightly and wrapped an arm around her. She stilled for a second not knowing what to do. Harry’s grip tightened and she found that she couldn’t get away unless she really tried. Harry sighed lightly and breathed deeply once. She waited for him to wake up. *‘Surely he isn’t used to this? Well, Harry Potter has probably had half of Hogwarts by now. Probably used to a female sleeping in his bed. Maybe he is still hurting from the injuries?’*

But, Harry didn’t wake up, and Tonks fell asleep thinking a variety of things. She made a mental list of things to do the next day. Talking to her boss was one of them; Dumbledore was another. She knew the wards would be triggered if anyone else entered the property. She was linked to the wards so she felt safe falling asleep. After all, Harry was right next to her. She would know if anything happened.

A vibration caused Tonks to wake up. She found herself staring into the eyes of Hedwig who was sitting on the headboard. Tonks could swear that the owl was giving her a look of thanks. Hedwig ruffled her feathers and looked behind Tonks at what must be Harry. The look on the bird’s face changed. She seemed concerned. Tonks thought to herself that she must still be groggy from sleep. *‘Owls don’t show emotion like that. They are birds for Merlin’s sake.’*

She realised that Harry’s hand had moved slightly during the night and was cupping her breast. She felt safe and warm inside along with

the uncertainty of the situation. Try as she might, she could only think that their bodies fitted together well. Taking a chance, Tonks turned over slowly and finally managed to face a sleeping Harry. His dark hair was sticking up in all directions adding to his youthful appearance. His face was more relaxed than she could ever remember seeing it. He seemed to realise that his previous 'arrangement' had been disturbed. He gripped her sides and pulled her closer to him. Tonks just watched and waited. She still had ten minutes to get downstairs and outside before she was relieved.

Harry's mouth was open slightly and he breathed just a little bit through it. Tonks couldn't help but think how cute it was. This was a side of Harry that she had never seen. She wondered how many people had seen it. *'Probably every Gryffindor female within two years of him and a few Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs too. Oh, to be in school again.'*

Tonks waited a few more minutes and slowly slid out of Harry's tight grip. *'Quidditch hands.'* She moved to the door and stepped into the hallway. She looked back, once, before closing the door. Walking down the stairs, she heard a noise coming from the kitchen.

She made her way down the rest of the stairs, nearly falling down the last five steps, and entered the sterile room she remembered from the year before. Petunia was beginning to get the food ready for breakfast. Tonks cleared her throat softly causing Petunia to turn abruptly and drop an egg on the floor. The yoke broke and ran with the white into a small pool mixed with broken shell.

"I will not forget what happened last night, woman," Tonks said in her most authoritative voice. "You have allowed Harry to be abused his entire life. You have no idea what some people would do to you if they knew that."

"What do you mean?" Petunia said, snottily trying to hide her fear of the witch. "He has had a roof over his head and that is more than he deserves."

"Say that in front of a few people, and you will not live the day, Petunia," Tonks said, controlling her anger.

Petunia seemed to deflate. A flash of guilt washed over her face. Her imaginary life seemed to fall down around her. "He looks so much like him. He is a constant reminder of her, too. Those eyes. They never let you go."

"Harry is his own person," Tonks explained. "He is the sum of Lily and James. I've heard many things about the both of them, but I know things about Harry. You should consider yourself privileged to have him here. Many would do anything to have Harry Potter stay with them for the summer. From what I have seen, your family is not worth the effort Harry seems to put into you."

"What do you mean?" Petunia asked, truly confused and looking slighted.

"Harry could go anywhere he wanted in our world and have a loving home to stay in with a loving family all too willing to share. He has friends willing to fight for him. He has people willing to kill for him. The thing is, he doesn't realise what people will do for him. People who get close to him will follow him anywhere. He has that ability."

"Lily had that ability," Petunia said softly after a few seconds of thought. "She always was the centre of attention. She, I don't know, held people somehow. Was that her ma-magic doing that?"

"Never met her, so I don't know. Most likely it was just the way she was. Do you know anything about Harry's life at school?"

"No," Petunia said. "We don't know anything other than the nightmares he had last summer. He would scream and wake everyone up though."

"If you saw and went through what he did, you would too," Tonks said angrily. She decided to diffuse her frustration by asking the woman a question instead of hexing her. "You never asked him about it?"

"Even if I did, he wouldn't tell me anything anyway. Those things are not to be spoken of here. He knows that."

“You should find out,” Tonks countered, losing her patience in the process. “He has done so much. He has made such a difference in our world. You might learn something if you took the time.”

“He would never tell me.” Petunia looked lost. “I’ve given him no reason to trust me.”

“If an owl shows up with a paper, would you read it?”

“One of your papers?” Petunia asked. “Moving pictures and all?”

“Yep. I could probably get you a book that would be more accurate, though. Our papers are just like yours; thirty percent truth, twenty percent half-truths, and fifty percent rubbish. Harry has had his share of rubbish, bloody gits. But he has kept on.”

“He has been in your papers?”

“Has Harry Potter been in the papers?” Tonks couldn’t believe they were this out of touch. “You really have no clue, do you? How could I make a comparison? Tony Blair would have less coverage than Harry. Harry, alone, can sell out whole printings. He goes for weeks on the front page. Hates every moment of it from what I can tell. I will send you a book if I find one that is accurate. Will you read it if I did?”

Petunia took a moment to think it over. She thought and seemed to decide but was apprehensive in her response. “Yes, I will read it. I will have to keep it hidden from Vernon, but I will read it. If he is as popular as you say.”

“He is a hero, champion, winner, athlete, and hottie all rolled into one.”

Petunia gave Tonks a disapproving look on the last comment. She also seemed to maintain a level of scepticism about the rest of what was said.

“Well, I must go since my replacement is nearly here. We are watching Harry so don’t think you can go back to the way things were before, after I leave. Leave him alone for today. I will be back tonight and we might be able to work out a tentative truce.”

Tonks watched Petunia look down at the floor and saw the egg drying on the floor. Tonks waved her wand at the egg and it disappeared without a trace. Petunia let out a slight squeak, but did nothing else.

“Handy thing magic.” Tonks turned and left the kitchen. She breezed out the front door and went to her guard position. She was there for less than a minute when someone came up behind her.

“Dung, you are terrible at stealth,” Tonks said, jokingly. “I couldn’t hear you, but the smell gave you away long before that was possible.”

“Sup’ Tonksy,” slurred Dung. “I am what I am.”

“Yeah and drunk, but who’s complaining,” Tonks replied. “You messed up last time, Dung. Do it again, and even Dumbledore won’t be able to save you. Watch the Muggles carefully. Our warning didn’t do much good. Don’t be afraid to hurt the fat one if need be.”

“Whi’ fat one?”

“Either, I am not particular. I will be back at six.” Tonks Disapparated to the Ministry leaving Dung to put on his invisibility cloak and settle in for a long day.

Tonks entered the atrium with a crack and headed past the guard station. The Ministry was quiet this early in the morning. Only a few night shift people and early risers were about. The lift was as slow as always to arrive. It dinged and Tonks entered and pressed the button. It rattled and descended into the depths of the Ministry. She was lost in thoughts about what she was about to do. Could this be the way to help? Could this help at all? Could this ruin whatever plans had already been made?

It didn’t matter. Harry asked for help and he never did that from what Tonks knew. Sure he was delirious, but it was sincere. She would figure out the rest later. He needed help against You-Know-Who and she could give that. She knew people who could help a lot. She was still lost in thought when the lift dinged and called out the floor, “Level Nine, Department Of Mysteries.”

Tonks exited the lift and walked down the hallway. She stopped half way and turned to the left. She drew her wand, tapped the wall in a specific pattern, and spoke a set of words. A door appeared and Tonks opened and entered the newly created doorway. *'It was now or never.'*

Harry woke up feeling rested for the first time in as long as he could remember. He reached for his glasses and found them in a different place than he would usually put them at Privet Drive. As he turned his head to put the glasses on, a pain sparked across his head.

"Ah, what the hell happened?" Harry thought for a bit and began to remember Vernon attacking him. He hit his head, there was blood, Tonks was there, and then darkness. He searched the room for anything else that was out of the ordinary. The same old furniture was there. Hedwig was in her cage with her head tucked under her wing. His trunk was at the foot of his bed.

"Wait a minute; the trunk's a lot smaller than the bed. That isn't right." Harry looked at the bed and noticed there was more of it to either side of him. The bed was bigger. *'The Dursleys didn't do this. They would be more likely to get a smaller bed. It must have been Tonks.'*

Harry looked around again. No note from the Ministry was waiting, so at least they could tell that Harry didn't do the enlargement charm unlike the hover charm before his second year. Harry pulled himself out of bed and sat up fighting off the bout of dizziness that washed over him. The room swirled a little bit but righted itself quickly enough. *'No quick movements for the day, I guess. I hope the Dursleys stay away until this passes.'*

After a quick wash up, Harry dumped his dirty clothes in his room with his enlarged bed and made his way carefully downstairs. The steps were a little difficult to navigate, but nowhere near as bad as the night before. At the bottom landing, Harry listened for the Dursleys. Hearing nothing, Harry advanced into the living room scanning for 'relatives'.

He found nothing but the usual pillows, couch, chair, and obnoxious wallpaper. The clock on the mantel told him it was one o'clock in the afternoon. *'I hope Tonks didn't kill them. That would be...tragic.'*

Harry couldn't think of why he had been left alone for the day. He had never been allowed to sleep in. It was a workday so that explained the absence of his uncle. Dudley was most likely out terrorising the neighbourhood kids or worse.

That left his aunt. She had to be out shopping or something. She wouldn't leave him alone this long. There was work to be done for sure. Harry crept to the kitchen door and listened for a minute. The only sound he could hear was the sound of an occasional page being turned. His aunt read every now and then, but it was usually circulars or the tabloids. A book was something she hardly ever read.

Deciding it was time to test the waters and hopefully begin a different summer holiday; Harry opened the kitchen door and entered the very clean room. He saw his aunt sitting at the table with her back to the doorway hunched over a book. He could tell that she hadn't moved since lunch, because the dishes from lunch were still sitting on the table. Some food remained on the table and Harry figured now was his chance to see if things were going to be different.

Mustering his Gryffindor courage, Harry began the short trip to the table and sat opposite his aunt. She failed to notice him at first, but it was obvious when she did see him. She grabbed a creased bit of paper from the side of the table and quickly covered the book she was reading with it.

Harry saw a few emotions on her face the most prominent being fear. Fear of what, Harry didn't know. Another was apprehension and the third was one Harry had never seen when she looked at him. The best he could figure the emotion was pride.

"Good afternoon," came the forced form of greeting from Aunt Petunia. "Help yourself to whatever you would like that is on the table. I advise you to be scarce when your uncle returns at six. Dudley will be home later."

"Yes, Aunt Petunia," Harry said automatically. She had made the first move and it was positive, or at least neutral. Knowing when the others should arrive would help him avoid the inevitable confrontation that was sure to follow. *'Tonks must have talked to Petunia before*

she left last night. That has to be the reason she is being nice to me right now.’ “I will clean off the table before I eat then.”

Harry was met with a raised eyebrow that could rival Snape’s. “No need. Just take what you want, but I’d prefer to be alone in the kitchen.”

“Okay.” Harry figured that the request was more than favourable compared to what he had been expecting to get. He grabbed food keeping a careful watch for the slightest hint that he had taken too much. His aunt’s eyes followed his fluid movements as he piled the leftovers onto a plate. Harry had taken bread, ham, cheese, crisps, an apple, and a glass of juice. He ran out of room on his plate before he received any indication from his aunt to stop.

‘First meeting – success.’ Harry didn’t know if this was the quiet before the storm or if this was for real. He decided he should take it as a victory and retreat to safer waters to watch the reaction. He nodded respectfully to his aunt and left the kitchen and hurried up the stairs to his room. Only when the door closed did he think he was safe to eat more food than he had ever had inside Number Four.

Lunch was eaten quickly and the plate left clean except for the apple core. Harry looked around the room trying to figure out if he was still asleep. Nothing so far today had made any sense. His aunt had never been violent towards him, but she’d always been the most hurtful. The coldness and lack of caring from her had been more scarring than the belt or punches from Vernon or Dudley.

As his aunt - his blood - she was supposed to be the most loving person towards him. She had never been nice to him. She had never shown any warmth. Something had changed with her and he didn’t know what it was or what had caused it. He needed to talk to Tonks to figure out what she had done or said to them after he passed out.

Family issues aside, Harry needed to begin working on his summer plans. He was staying alive by being in this house. *‘Staying here is enough effort on that. Protecting my mind on the other hand needs a lot more effort. I need a book that can help with that and I need it now. Something to ask Tonks if she comes back.’*

'Taking control of my life, well I guess I am starting that one. The events of last night were evidence enough of that. Information will be a hard one to work on. Dumbledore will not tell me anything unless he has too, and even then it will be too late to do any good.'

'Keeping others safe means I have to be able to help them. I have to be able to protect them. Staying here won't do that. I have to be out there either guarding them or stopping Voldemort from attacking them. Both of those options suck and are even harder to accomplish. My guards won't let me leave and Voldemort is not likely to take it easy on me. The Death Eaters will be after me worse than before since I basically got some of them arrested.'

'Learning is another thing entirely. Books only go so far and I learn better by doing. That will be the hardest thing to do this summer. I can't practice since I'll be expelled immediately if I do. Or will I?'

'Dumbledore can't expel me. I am the only person that can kill Voldemort. If I am expelled, it would be that much easier to kill me. Dumbledore can't let his weapon be killed that easily. He would do everything he could to prevent it. That means I am in a position of control. He needs me, the whole Wizarding world needs me whether they know it or not. I am marked whether or not people know I can kill Voldemort. He and all of his lackeys are after me even without knowing I am the key. So I would go from the top of the list to what, higher on the list. Hahaha, whatever. It's my life, not theirs. It is my future, not Dumbledore's. I will do this one my way unless I find a better way and people willing to let me participate in it.'

'I have little choice since I am in this to win or die. Shitty options, but those are the only ones I've got. So, I keep working the 'relatives' angle and I start my fight on my own terms for my own ends. Life and a reason to live it.'

Harry unpacked his trunk as much as he dared. He kept the important items and some food under the loose floorboard and his school things in the trunk. Harry started reading a book of curses he had. Later, he looked around and found the shadows getting longer. Harry figured his uncle would be home soon and prepared for that meeting. He knew it wouldn't go as well as the one with his aunt.

Tonks left the lift feeling better than she did when she went in. Her meeting with her boss had gone well considering she hadn't got an answer at the end of the meeting. She was on her way to Diagon Alley now to find a book for that hateful Muggle. Maybe Petunia could be saved, but she doubted it. With a crack, Nymphadora Tonks appeared in Diagon Alley. One thing that stood out was that everyone who was in the Alley was looking over their shoulders waiting for the next attack. Those that remembered the last time were the most nervous of the bunch. She passed her fellow Aurors who had been stationed in the Alley since the Ministry had been forced to admit You-Know-Who had returned. Fudge was only hanging onto his job because he had greased the wheels of government for years prior.

Tonks was convinced that, with a little push, Fudge could be tossed out on his head. If Dumbledore had asked for his resignation publicly, the Wizengamot would have supported the request and Fudge would be gone. The best she could figure was that Dumbledore could manage Fudge and control how things were handled. His control had waned for a few years, but now Fudge knew his job rested in the hands of the Headmaster.

'So much for separation of powers,' Tonks thought. She continued to Flourish and Blotts and entered the bookstore. It was mostly empty, but a few people were about browsing the shelves. They acted much in the same way as those in Diagon Alley by looking over their shoulders and jumping at the least bit noise.

Tonks found the section for biographies after nearly scaring two people out of their socks. She located the Harry Potter shelf easily enough since there was a display for it. The recent vindication of The-Boy-Who-Lived had put him back on top of the popularity list. She remembered hearing Remus and Sirius talk about some of these books. Apparently her cousin had taken an interest in them. Knowing his sense of humour, Sirius had most likely planned to read them and use them to embarrass Harry when he could. Now, Tonks was trying to remember which one had been the most accurate.

She found one written by F.L.D and thought that rang a bell. The title, 'Harry Potter: Not A Fantasy Story' sounded like the one. She flipped through it and read a bit about this first year of life. The book was

really vague about his years with the Dursleys since it only took up one chapter. Every year of school had at least two chapters dedicated to it and the book stopped after Harry's fourth year. Tonks figured that was good enough.

She doubted that it would do any good, but she had to try for Harry's sake. She bought the book and went to post office to send the book to Petunia. At the very least, the owl would remind Petunia that Tonks was still out there and returning soon enough. She left the post office and prepared herself for her visit to Hogwarts. Dumbledore was an imposing person and even worse when he was in his office. She knew he wouldn't go to headquarters for a few days and this issue needed to be resolved fast. With another crack, Tonks was at the gates to Hogwarts.

The imposing castle sat on the hill up the path. Tonks took a deep breath and began the long walk to the confrontation she had been dreading since last night. Her mind wandered to what Harry had done and what he had said. This was important and she was not going to leave without doing what needed to be done. The trip had taken less time than she'd planned and she soon found herself standing in front of the oak doors. With a steadying breath, Tonks opened the door and entered the school.

She walked up the stairs hearing her every step echo off the walls. She made her way to the office stairwell. Halfway there she heard a cackle and Peeves appeared in her way.

"Oh, me sees an oldie," Peeves said delighted. "You had best not forget your knickers this time, Nymphy. Peevesy remembers the good things."

"Watch it you ghost-wannabe. I know how to exorcise spirits like you. Give me a reason not to?"

"Oh, you were never any fun. Only funny-looking when the boys would ask you to change into someone else. Peeves remembers how you used to cry." Peeves floated away as a spell ricocheted off the wall where he had been moments before. Tonks tried to calm herself, but she was mad, upset, and full of self-loathing.

'That fucking ghost had to bring that up, didn't he? He had to remind me of how I was then. What I did. Next time, I won't hesitate to kill him for good.' She gathered her wits trying to calm herself because she knew that Dumbledore would probe her mind. He would do what he needed to do to find out everything. He only needed to know certain things and she was determined to see that he learned only what he had to know.

Tonks arrived at the entryway and sent a message to Dumbledore using the spell he had devised. A silvery bolt shot from her wand and went through the wall. A few seconds later, the gargoyle moved aside and Tonks was riding the stairs upwards. The office door came into view and Tonks hesitated before stepping forward. She cleared her mind and shielded her thoughts. She stepped forward and the door opened of its own accord.

Tonks entered the circular office to find Dumbledore sitting at his desk looking at a silvery device that wasn't spinning properly. A box was next to the desk and inside were pieces of damaged bits of silver. Dumbledore was concentrating on his wand movements and she could feel the magic at work. The device shuddered and spun slowly until it popped and the spinning stopped. Seconds later the device fell apart and clattered to the desk and floor. The old man sighed and smiled slightly.

"Nymphadora," he began, "For future reference I would advise you to avoid angering Harry Potter to the point that he destroys anything that you enjoy. Unlike most people, when he breaks something it stays broken. I must say that I have not been able to repair a few of my more complicated trinkets. I assure you I have tried and failed every time with this one. The others are in much the same condition." Pushing aside the pieces of the object, Dumbledore said, "Now enough rambling about my excessive bits of junk. You would not be here if it wasn't important. You would never risk a meeting with Peeves for a trivial matter."

"Yes, Albus it is important." Tonks sighed inwardly. She didn't understand how he could know what had just happened with Peeves. "I was at Harry's when 'they' returned. The uncle tried to kill Harry

once he got in the house. I must ask that Harry be moved for his own safety."

"Was Harry injured?" Albus seemed more interested in Harry's condition and not the reason Tonks was before him.

"If I wasn't there, you would have a fat Muggle to dispose of and Harry Potter's death to explain. Harry is resting now, but he was hurt badly enough that I had to use some healing spells. Now, what are we going to do about this?"

"What did you do to the Dursleys?"

"Not as much as I wanted," Tonks said, getting angry. "I should have killed the uncle, but I didn't. Harry got to him first. You are lucky that he didn't use any magic to protect himself. Isn't Harry on a short list when it comes to underage magic?"

"Yes, he has received a warning or two, but right now I believe the Minister has more important things to deal with that don't involve reminding the public that Mr. Potter was right and he was wrong. All-in-all, Harry is in a much safer position with the Ministry in mind."

"So, what are your plans on handling the situation?"

"You have taken care of the injuries and warned the Dursleys again?" Albus asked, hinting that the situation was resolved.

"They were warned, but I doubt the uncle learns that fast. Is that all you plan to do?"

"I consider the matter closed, Nymphadora. If any further abuse occurs, I will look into the matter personally. Is there anything else you wished to discuss?"

Tonks couldn't believe it. A student, - an important student, - was being abused by the people that Albus placed him with and he was doing nothing. "You consider the matter closed? How can you consider the abuse of Harry Potter closed? It has occurred for years. Ever since you put him there he has been abused one way or another. How can you?"

"If you look at the bigger picture, Ms. Tonks, you will see that Harry has turned out to be a wonderful person. He only has one more summer with them after this and then he will have no reason to return there again. Have you been getting enough sleep lately? Working all night and then being awake during the day as well can place a dramatic toll on the body."

"I am fine, Albus, but Harry isn't. I find it hard to believe that you plan to do nothing about what happened and what has been happening. At the very least, the Order should be made aware of..."

"I believe us knowing is enough for now. If others learn of this, then there is a greater chance Voldemort will find out. We must limit the number of people who know what. Do you understand, Nymphadora?"

"Do not call me by that name, Sir. You know I hate it." Tonks paused, and controlled her mind again. "I will be leaving now, Sir. I have a few things to take care of before I get back to Harry's. Will I be able to switch schedules with Dung the day after tomorrow? I believe the switch might work better for both of us."

Dumbledore hesitated and Tonks felt a light probing at her mind. She held steady and found Dumbledore looking puzzled. "Yes, I believe the switch would make better sense, but has your work schedule changed? That was the original reason you were put on nights."

"Yes, I have been reassigned to nights," Tonks said. "This will workout better for everyone."

"Very well, I will make the change on Wednesday. Please tell Mundungus that he will need to alter his busy social calendar." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at his own joke.

"I will handle guard duty on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning then. Thank you for your time, Sir." Tonks turned and left the office. She couldn't believe what had been said. He didn't even flinch when he learned what had happened. He either knew beforehand or he didn't care. Either way, Harry had been right. He said no one would care and the one who should care most, didn't. Tonks hurried down the steps and out of the castle. Her plan made even more sense now

that she had confirmed the truth. Checking her watch told her that she had a couple hours left before she had to get to Harry's before the uncle made it home. She knew he wouldn't have learned just from one night.

Leaving the grounds at a quickened pace allowed Tonks to Apparate away earlier, she appeared in the Ministry for the second time that day. With her plan coming together and her chances of abandoning it fading, Tonks went in search of Kingsley. He needed to know where she would be or at least a good enough excuse preventing him from asking about her.

Harry sat in his room reading about dangerous curses that were almost banned by the Ministry. "Stab, slash, twist, pull, flick. Eww, that is a nasty one. Liquefy the eyes, how can that be legal?" Harry flipped the page and checked the *legal* section of the spell. "Oh, there is a counter-curse and a potion to repair it. But it would work in a fight since they can't see until they are treated. The Bone Breaking hex looks effective too. Ooh, Bone Exploding looks really bad. It could kill if you hit them in the right place. A few places actually, but this is war, right? I am literally fighting for my life." Harry looked up and found Hedwig watching him. "Sorry girl, I might be losing my mind since I am talking to myself." Hedwig ruffled her feathers and stuck her beak in the air.

"Sorry, Hedwig, I didn't mean anything by it. I was talking to you, okay. You're the only one who has stuck by me from the beginning no matter what anyone has said." Hedwig calmed down and seemed to relax. Harry returned to his book memorising what he could. As page after page flipped by, Harry found spells that he could use to protect himself and others. A few showed strong promise for serious situations like another Ministry debacle or a graveyard scenario. *'I wish I knew some of these then. Things may have been different. People might still be alive enjoying their lives or making mine better. I will not let you down, Sirius.'*

The hours slipped by peacefully in the house with the only conflict occurring in Harry's mind. The battle between his morals and ideals and the reality of his life was a difficult one for Harry to come to terms with. *'To survive, I may need to stoop to their level. To live, I'll*

probably have to kill.' The turmoil gave Harry cause to reassess many of the things he had seen and done. Alternatives reared their ugly heads at many stages revealing better and worse outcomes. Shaking the images from his head, he said "What did Tonks say? Never hesitate in a fight and worry about things afterward." Harry sighed as he realized that was the only way to win a real fight. The Death Eaters never hesitated. Voldemort never hesitated. Neither ever showed regret for their actions.

The process of attempting to learn the spells and the mental justification for actually using them continued until his stomach gave a rumble breaking his concentration and turmoil. Harry marked his page, closed the book, and stood up. He didn't want to test his luck again since the last time was far too positive of an experience. He contemplated his choices, but always came back to his decision to take control of his life. His 'relatives' would not stop him from enjoying his summer. He needed food and they were not going to stop him from eating either.

A choice made, Harry opened his door and headed down stairs slowly while remaining determined on controlling his life. When he opened the kitchen door, he found his aunt sitting in the same place as before. The dishes had been cleaned away but there she sat reading the same book. Harry watched her for a few minutes seeing her subtly shake her head a few times and tilt it from side to side as if trying to figure something out.

Choosing to announce his presence, Harry cleared his throat causing Petunia to jump. She turned to look at him and covered the book with the paper again. What startled Harry the most was the look of horror on her face. Not sure how to handle the situation, Harry held his ground and stared at her with a scowl growing on his face. *'She is going to snap at me. I knew it wouldn't last.'*

"Harry," she said pausing to correct her voice that cracked. "Help yourself to whatever you want from the pantry and fridge. Vernon is bringing take-away for us. You know he won't let you touch it so get what you can now and be off before he gets here."

"Thank you," Harry said, trying to understand what had happened to his aunt. *'Not what I expected. Maybe it's the Imperious Curse. Maybe Tonks threatened Dudley's life if she was mean to me.'* Harry quickly got some cold chicken out of the refrigerator and put it on a plate. He poured himself some juice as well since it had been awhile since his last drink.

Thoughts still rolling through his head distracted him enough that when he opened the pantry and reached in, he bumped a glass jar that held the rare preserves his aunt would make once a year. Without breaking his thought process, Harry instinctively snatched the jar out of the air as it fell. He returned it to its shelf and found the crisps he was after.

Petunia had just finished reading about a Quidditch match Harry had played a few years ago. She doubted that her nephew could play any sport and read the section with a sceptical eye. *'He was always so skinny and weak-looking. He would get killed during a sport even for fun let alone one for real.'* After giving him permission to eat, she watched him move about the kitchen. She noticed that he didn't display any of the awkwardness that teenagers often had. His movements were smooth and precise.

When the jar fell, Petunia almost yelled at him, but she stopped herself when his hand shot out and grabbed it instantly. She couldn't believe he could do that. The description of his sport was vague, because it was meant for a reader who already knew the basics. But Petunia had figured out that speed and precision were keys for the 'Seeker' position, and she just saw him use those skills. Petunia debated with herself, but she had to be sure.

She saw her empty teacup sitting on the table. With a quick and very un-Petunia-like thought, she said Harry's name and threw it into the air near him. She watched Harry spin around on his feet and capture her eyes with his. The green held her for only a second then darted away and returned to hers. She saw his hand reach out and save the cup from a loud, disastrous landing.

Harry's stare was all consuming. He held her where she was sitting. She saw him place the cup on the counter while he seemed to be

figuring her out like a cat would before striking a mouse. Only when he asked what was going on did she feel the gaze lessen.

"I wanted to see it for myself, that's all," she said. "Is that what you do? You catch things? That is what your sport's about?"

Harry didn't know what to think. She had just asked him about Quidditch. A wizard sport was being talked about in this house by her own choice. Harry scanned the room quickly looking for anything out of place and focusing on the only thing, the book that his aunt was hiding from him. The paper looked like the parchment Flourish and Blotts used to wrap their books when they were sent by owl. Harry saw a bit of twine sticking out of the book too.

Something was wrong and it involved that book. It was the only thing that made sense. Harry took two steps toward the table. Petunia looked down at the paper and slid her chair backwards slightly, making a scraping sound on the floor. Harry pulled the paper away and found a moving picture of himself looking up. A scowl appeared on his face. This was not a good situation.

"How did you get this book?" He wanted the truth and he was going to get it.

"Why?" Petunia asked with a smirk. "Is it all a lie? Did you get someone to write all this as a joke?"

"I didn't even know this book existed," Harry snapped. "But you haven't answered my question."

"I sent it, Harry," was Tonks's cheery answer as she entered the room. "I bought it and sent it here for her to read. She wanted to know," Tonks paused, "well, she was somewhat interested," She amended after Harry gave her a look of disbelief. "It looks like she's been reading it too. Why not let her finish it? She might treat you better if she knew the truth."

"I highly doubt anything written about me, especially in a book, will be accurate. No one knows the real truth of any of it except me and a few others who were there. Only one article has been accurate and

Hermione more or less wrote it. This is most likely just more lies about me either to make me better or worse than I really am."

Harry stared down both of the women in the room. He wanted to leave and vent his anger. *'Why can't I be a normal person?'*

"Did you really lose all the bones in your arm?" Petunia asked tentatively, not truly recognising the anger Harry was trying to contain.

"What?" Harry couldn't believe she had asked that question. "In second year?" A nod. "Yeah. Idiot teacher tried to mend the bones, but he vanished them instead. Hurts to regrow them and the potion tastes dreadful. At least they got that right but what about the real stuff? Really messed it up, I am sure. They always do."

"Dementors, a lot of them, just like last summer?"

"Third year, which time?" Harry felt like he was in some twisted dream where everything was the opposite of reality.

"At the end of school, I guess." Petunia seemed more inquisitive than judgmental for the first time in her life.

"They were trying to kill Sirius," Harry paused and fought off the sad thoughts that tried to overtake him. "I guess they were trying to kill me too, but they'd almost got his soul. So I used my Patronus and saved us. There were only about a hundred of them. It wasn't like someone was shooting spells at me or anything. That was the next year." Harry went quiet dealing with his dark thoughts and emotions.

"A hundred of them?" Tonks knew a little bit about the incident, but she didn't know the details. "How in the name of Merlin did you fight off a hundred Dementors? Most people can't fight off one let alone multiples."

"He fought off, two was it, last summer and saved my Dudley," Petunia defended much to Harry's shock. "Is more than one really that much of a difference?"

"You have no idea of the difference when there are more of them," Tonks was openly gaping at Harry. "I've been tested against two of

them, and I barely made it. If there had been three, I would've needed to be rescued. It was part of my final phase to graduate from the Auror Academy."

"I did what needed to be done," Harry said quietly. "I always have. I've never had a choice in the matter, really. Have to stay alive, right?"

Tonks was getting depressed listening to the casual way Harry talked about deadly situations. "Harry, how many times has your life been in imminent danger?"

"Ha ha ha," Harry couldn't help but laugh. "Define 'imminent danger' please. Voldemort I will give you, but falling from a broom or flying away from a dragon would be a matter of opinion wouldn't it?"

"Anytime your life could have ended by the action of others and dragons count." Tonks couldn't help but be surprised as Harry grew very serious and started thinking. He ran out of fingers quickly.

"I'd say at least twenty times, but I am probably missing some or counting them differently than you would. That's as good as I can guess without having Hermione here to add them up. She would know better than I would actually."

"Yet you're still here," Tonks smiled, trying to cover up her awe. "Anyway, I figured your aunt might like to read a little bit about you. I've heard that this was the most accurate book about you."

"Is a Basilisk real?" questioned Petunia.

"Yep, dirty great snake too. I got lucky that time thanks to Fawkes. Well, I'd best get out of here before Uncle Vernon shows up. I would like to talk to you, Tonks."

"I'll be with you shortly, Harry," Tonks answered. "I have a few things to discuss with your aunt. Go on, I'll be fine."

Harry gathered his food and left the kitchen giving a sharp glare to Tonks as he left. He went up to his room and started eating while waiting impatiently for her to come up.

Tonks looked at the book and Petunia. "I'm glad you started reading that. I see you've paid attention to it. I guess it is somewhat factual since Harry didn't make much mention of things being wrong."

"I'm not sure I can believe much of it. It's all so, unnatural. How can all these things happen to him? How can these things happen at a school?"

"Hogwarts is a different kind of school, no doubt. But it's the best we have here. The thing is, Harry is the difference. He's not like anyone else. He is Harry Potter. He's been a celebrity since he was one year old and his celebrity status is only increasing. There's nothing he can do about it either since he's only being himself. Think on that, why don't you. Just being Harry, and he is more famous than anyone else. Every witch and wizard in the world knows his name.

"Keep reading that book and then think about the boy who grew up here. They are the same person. Now, I have someone waiting to yell at me for giving you that book. I'd best not put this off any longer. Keep that 'man' under control or last night will look like a party compared to the next time." Tonks turned and left the kitchen steeling herself for the coming storm. Harry was going to be mad.

The door opened and Harry turned on the spot. His eyes blazed with a fire that could set the room alight. Tonks entered the room and closed the door. She waved her wand and cast a silencing charm. *'She knows what's coming. She knows and she's going to take it because she knows what she did was wrong.'*

"What in the bloody hell do you think you are doing giving that woman a book about me?" Harry said biting off the ends of his words. "What did you hope to accomplish, huh? Why the fuck would you do that? Tell me."

"I had a discussion with her this morning when I left and she seemed interested."

"Ha, not likely," Harry quipped. "She only wants information to use against me. They'll probably put out an advertisement offering me to Voldemort for a few quid. Wait 'til Vernon gets wind of this. He'll jump at the chance to be rid of me and make a little money on the side.

Besides, you had no right to do it. This is my sentence. Every summer I am locked away here until Dumbledore sees fit to release me. Now, you're trying to make it worse. Do you hate me that much?"

"Harry, I don't hate you, quite the opposite. I'm trying to help, and I think it's working. She seemed intrigued and has she yelled at you or been mean yet?"

"Not yet."

Tonks looked victorious.

"Give her time, she'll sweep in and get you when you aren't expecting it. That's her way, you know. Oh wait, you don't know, do you? I do 'cause this is where I grew up. I know how things work around here. I don't need your help fixing things. I had my own plan for that."

Tonks's patience was running out. She could take a little bit of dressing down, but this was getting irritating. "And just what were you going to do? Do magic and get expelled?"

"Can't happen," Harry said definitively. "Dumbledore wouldn't let it happen. He can't let it happen. If I am expelled, he loses and Voldemort wins. As I said, never happen."

"You're sure of that, aren't you?"

"Yep, one of the few things I am sure of. I don't know who I can trust, but I do know that I can't be expelled. He would lose control over me. He couldn't monitor me as closely as he wants. I would be free and he can't have that. Did the same thing to Sirius and look what happened there. I won't be controlled like that anymore. So you can go back to him and tell him off for me."

"I'm not here as his spy, Harry," Tonks was beginning to see that this had less to do with the book and more to do with the Headmaster. "I'm your guard for the night and I'm here as a friend. You asked me to help you last night and I plan to do just that. Do you remember asking?"

“No, I don’t remember anything about last night after I came upstairs. What did I say?” Harry looked nervous for the first time Tonks could remember and it wasn’t a comforting sight.

“You asked for my help in learning things. You said that it was your job to kill ‘Him’. If you died, he won. I’m not sure what makes you think that, but that’s what you said.”

Harry looked downright sick at that point. His eyes were shifting around the room quickly searching for something that wasn’t there. He almost had a caged animal feel about him. Tonks stepped back to the door afraid to find out what would happen if he decided to act. This man had stood up to You-Know-Who more than once and lived. He’d done something no one else had, and she didn’t want that ability directed at her.

“Harry, what’s wrong? You didn’t say anything wrong. Please, calm down. Things aren’t that bad, are they?”

Harry had let his worst fears out and Tonks heard them. Thinking fast Harry decided he should work with what he had and not make things up. “Think about it, Tonks. How else could it end? It isn’t like ‘He’ has it in for someone else, is it? I am the only one that got away. I’m a living example of his failure. Everyday I live is that much more of an insult to him. I’m proof ‘He’ isn’t infallible and he hates me for it. Moreover, Dumbledore won’t kill him. He could have, but didn’t. I watched him let ‘Him’ go.”

“Then use that Harry. You’re an example for everyone.”

“And how would I do that from here? The Ministry is just waiting for a chance to try and get me chucked out of school or tossed into Azkaban if that doesn’t work. They tried before. And who knows what Dumbledore is waiting for. Why would I care about all those people? They’ll turn on me the first chance they get. They always do.”

“Harry, you need to take this one step at a time. Don’t get all worked up thinking of everything at once. You’re quick on your feet, but strategy isn’t your strong point.”

“Ha, you’re right about that. Just ask Ron about chess. I couldn’t beat him if he was in a coma.”

“There’s the happy Harry I want to see more of. I have the same problem, Harry. I can think on my feet, but planning isn’t what I do best.” At Harry’s smirk, Tonks dove for him and knocked him over. She landed on top of him and held him down as best she could. “You were about to make a crack about my balance issues, weren’t you, git?”

“Yes, Tonks,” Harry said jokingly, but quickly got a serious look on his face. “I was going to comment on how well you walk on your own two feet.”

With Tonks thinking about his words, Harry rolled them over. “Now, why did you give her that book?”

“Harry, we’ve been over that already. I gave it to her to help you while you’re here. Now, on Wednesday, I might have another - a much better way - to help you. I’ll be here Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. Now, unless you plan to get more familiar with me, cutie, I think we should sit down like civilized adults.”

Harry looked at the situation. Tonks legs were on either side of his, and he was holding her arms above her head. His head was inches away from hers and he could feel the rise and fall of her stomach against his lower regions. Having a pathetic amount of experience with this type of situation and conversation, Harry stood up quickly and turned red from embarrassment.

Tonks watched as her comment had the desired result. Harry was embarrassed and he was cute like that too. She’d paid attention to what had been said at Grimmauld place when it had been only the girls. Ginny had a terrible infatuation with Harry; and Hermione, being the diplomat, had said that he didn’t know what to do about it since he’d never known love or affection. Tonks figured that Harry had gotten over that in the past year. He’d grown into himself at least.

Harry sat down and fought the battle with his blush. *‘I am not going to turn bright red in front of her. She’s helping me and I am not going to do this. She’s one of the only people who treat normally’*

Tonks watched as the blush faded quickly. She didn't know what to do. Blushes didn't fade that fast. Something caused it and she had to find out what it was.

"Harry, how did you do that?"

"What, deciding to have at me some more?" Harry said trying to keep his head up.

"Nothing like that, Harry. People can't get rid of blushes that quick. I can, but you know why I can. Now, have you ever done anything like that before? Changed any physical things that can't be changed?"

"Not that I can remember, Tonks." Harry was trying to think of anything other than Tonks lying beneath him. Those thoughts would just get him in trouble. "I guess I made my hair grow once. Aunt Petunia cut all of mine off once and I didn't want to go to school looking like that. I was enough of an outcast as it was without being the bald headed freak too." Harry saw her eyes widen and thought she was trying to make him feel better. "Thanks for trying Tonks, but I can handle embarrassment on my own."

"I'm serious, Harry. You could be like me. There's a chance based on what you said. Of course, there are varying levels of Metamorphmagus. I'm the only one as advanced here. There are a few others who can hide their wrinkles or change the tint of their hair. None of them can change as much as I can. Now," Tonks said bouncing on the bed making it squeak, "what else have you done?"

Harry saw the eagerness on her face and in her body movements. Laughing to himself, he knew it was only a matter of time before she fell off the bed at the rate she was going. Concentrating, Harry tried to think of any other times he had changed his appearance. None came to mind. Shaking his head, "Sorry, Tonks, I can't think of any others. I've wanted to vanish this scar more times than I can count, but it has never worked."

Undeterred, Tonks explained, "Did you really want to hide it Harry? It is a part of you. You have had it as long as you can remember. Have you really, truly, wanted to hide it?"

“Yes, I hate this damn thing. It makes me stand out. It makes me that much more different than everyone else.”

“Is that a bad thing? You are different. I’m different. We all are.”

“But do you get stopped on the street and gawked at because you can look different? Do you get written about because of something you ‘didn’t’ do? I didn’t die and everyone is in awe of that. Big deal. What kind of life have I had up to this point, huh? Locked away here or fighting to stay alive out there.”

“Harry, you are who you are. People care about you for who you are, not what you have done. You really need to stop getting down on yourself. It’s unbecoming.” Tonks screwed her face into a look of superiority and stuck her nose in the air and made it grow a little bit.

“Cute. Thinking of challenging my aunt with that act? You would fit in perfectly with her crowd. I am surprised they ever wear the right shoes with the way they’re always looking up.”

“Funny, Harry. I spend most of my time looking down to avoid tripping over things.”

“Do you really think I’m a Metamorphmagus? No joking around, am I?”

“Let’s see if you are, OK?” Tonks tapped Harry with her wand a few times and mumbled some words. She continued the actions all around his body. “What do you know about us, Harry? Our limitations or abilities.”

“I only know what I’ve seen from you, Tonks. Is there more than that?”

“Harry, I am the most accomplished Metamorph in the country, well, known to the Ministry at least. I can change my face, hair colour and length, the tone of my skin, colour of my eyes, too many things to say really. I do have limits though. I can’t change my body size more than a little bit. My bones and joints aren’t really changeable. I can grow or shrink about an inch or so, but I can’t get as tall as you. I can change

my soft features, if you get my meaning, but the hard ones are beyond my ability. Any questions so far?"

"You can change some things, most things, but for the most part your body stays the same?"

"Yes, I can't change my core. I can't change any of my vital organs like the heart or lungs. I could try, but I could mess up and kill myself. Early on I decided to leave those things alone. It just wasn't worth it really."

"So, what do you really look like? No changes or anything like that. What does Tonks really look like?"

"You want to see the real me, huh? I'm plain, Harry. I like the added bits of flair, honestly. If you really want to though..." At Harry's nod, Tonks closed her eyes and focused on returning to her normal self.

As Harry watched, the heart-shaped face remained with its features keeping their sharpness, but the hair lengthened to shoulder length and turned a dark brown. Harry watched her figure for any changes and found that her breasts seemed to grow a little bit as her shirt stretched more across the front. Tonks opened her eyes and looked right at Harry finding him looking intently back.

"I like it, Tonks. It fits you. I guess it should since it's you." Harry let his eyes wander around her face studying her features more intently. Her eyes caught his and some of the nervousness he had felt faded away.

"Most people wonder what I can become, not what I started off as. I still like the colour though, so with your permission, dear sir..." Tonks scrunched up her face. The short pink hair returned and the breasts shrunk back to their previous size. "Would you like to work on this and see if you have the ability?"

"Can I do it without a wand? I don't want to test my theory that I can't be expelled just yet."

"Yes, everything's based on willpower and intent just like most magic." Harry got a puzzled look at that statement. "Oh, that's right

you are only up to fifth year material. You'll get exposed to all that this year. Well, no time like the present."

Tonks shifted herself slightly and assumed a tone a teacher would use. "Now, class, magic is made up of three parts: willpower, intent, and magical ability. Wand movements and words only assist wizards in casting spells because they force the proper mental state and intent when casting a spell. Now, class, have you ever seen or heard Dumbledore do a swish and flick or utter the words Wingardium Leviosa?"

Harry smirked at her tone but couldn't honestly remember Dumbledore using words to cast his spells. Shaking his head, Harry thought if he could do the same. Announcing your spells was a decided disadvantage in a fight.

"You are correct, he doesn't. Dumbledore performs wordless magic or intent-driven magic. His intent is his words. He commands the magic to happen and it does. It helps that he has more magical ability than anyone else, but that's beside the point. No one can do anything about their magical power unless they are willing to delve deeply into Dark Magic. Now, since there is only one of you," Tonks smiled brightly at Harry, "I will ask you for some examples of intent magic."

Harry decided to play along since things were going well. "I have had problems of accidental magic since I was about three, I guess."

"Harry, Remus told me about problems you had when you were only a month old. I believe your father ended up with a nappy on his head once for teasing you. I know Sirius used to get the soiled nappies though. I believe he was more consistent in his 'fun'. I've heard that you had very few accidental magic episodes and more intentional magic episodes. Think hard about this."

Harry racked his brain thinking of all the times he'd caused things to happen that shouldn't have occurred. "I was being chased by Dudley and his friends at school and the next thing I knew I was on the roof. I turned my teacher's hair blue. Grew my hair. I blew up my aunt third year, but that was accidental."

“At third year, Harry, you have control of your magic unless it is a life or death situation. My guess is that was a combination of both intentional and accidental. I get the impression your anger is an effective trigger for your magic judging by what happened last night.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were mad and I saw your aura, Harry. A real, visible aura that you sustained until you started up the stairs and began to lose consciousness. That is a form of willpower magic, but it isn’t really a separate type of magic. It’s only a driving force that works with your intent. I will explain it all later. Keep thinking of examples.”

“I guess I opened my cupboard, too, when I was leaving here once. Last year when the Dementors were attacking us, I’d lost my wand. I couldn’t see it, but I was calling out Lumos trying to find it. The wand lit up and it was a few feet away from me. Other than that, I can’t think of anything else. Does that help?”

“Yes, it does. You’ve quite a few examples, Harry. That’s a good thing because it will make this very easy for you to understand. I told you that words and movements are just triggers for the magic to happen. People with little magic in them or who are weak-minded need those triggers to cast spells. Inexperienced people need the same aids. That’s why they teach it in school. Everyone will be on the same level then, the powerful and gifted as well as the weak and new.

“Now, most of your examples are of intent or willpower. You wanted or needed something to happen so it did. You wanted to get back at Sirius for teasing you, so you levitated a dirty nappy onto his head. He loved that story by the way. He was so proud of his Marauder-in-training, as he put it. He was a bit touched in the head, but I loved him all the same. You getting away from your cousin, your hair, your wand lighting up; are all examples of your intent to achieve a specific outcome. Your willpower drives your intent. I can intend to Apparate to China and I can put all my willpower into it, but my magical ability won’t let it happen. I do not have enough magic to do it. If I am fighting a mental battle with someone and we have the same level of intent and magical ability, our willpower will decide the victor. Do you understand?”

“You mean like Legilimency and Occlumency?”

“You know about that? How? Better yet, why?”

“Dumbledore had Snape trying to break into my mind last year since Voldemort can do it. They were trying to get me to a point where I can block out his intrusions. I failed at it. Snape isn’t a good teacher to begin with, but when you’re doing things like that. Well, I am sure you can understand.” Judging by the look of horror on her face, Harry figured she understood completely.

“He had Snape teaching you that? Is he mad? Are you sure he hadn’t been at the bottle when he made that brilliant decision?”

“He said Snape would be the best person for the job since he understood how Voldemort used Legilimency. The lessons were a bloody nightmare; they didn’t help at all.”

“No shite they were worthless. That git couldn’t teach a cat to meow let alone someone he hates to protect their mind. I doubt he tried very hard, too. I bet the bat just loved beating up on you, didn’t he?”

“Got it in one, Tonks. That was until I looked into his Pensieve and saw some memories he wanted to remain hidden. He kicked me out after that. I managed to see some of his memories though, but it only happened after he got me mad. I guess, looking back at everything, anger does seem to work for me.”

“We can talk about that later. Anyway, that’s exactly it. You can have all the intent you want, but it would be your willpower that wins that fight. Magical ability won’t play into it at all. You learned about the Imperious Curse, right?”

“Yeah, the fake Moody put all of us under it during fourth year. I was the only one to fight it off.”

Another horrified expression told Harry that he had done something else weird. “What is Albus doing at that school? Has he lost his mind?” Tonks was mostly talking to herself. “So, you were the only one to fight it off?” At his nod, she continued. “That’s an example of

willpower. It's completely and totally, willpower. I hope that's the only time you have had to do that."

"Nope, Voldemort got me with it in the graveyard after the Triwizard Tournament. I fought that one off too. I also had the whole Priori Incantatem thing too. That was willpower, right?" Harry saw looks of awe and horror on Tonks face. Since she was a Metamorph, it was kind of funny to watch her face contort to accommodate both expressions.

Tonks recovered somewhat and managed to get her mouth under control enough to speak. "You fought off You-Know-Who's Imperius Curse? That was what you said, right?" She couldn't believe he had done that. She couldn't believe he had just said it like it was no big deal. "I am in awe, Harry. That's an amazing feat. I have no idea what you mean by the Priori Incantatem though. I will just take your word for it."

"So, I understand the first two, but what's Magical Ability then?" Harry asked trying not to make a big deal out of something else different about him.

"The raw magic inside of you. You are born with it. Purebloods are mistaken in the belief that they are born with more 'magic' in them than others. If it were true, then why are more Squibs born to purebloods? Answer that, if you can? An example would be your ability to cast the Patronus Charm. That takes both magical ability and intent. If you don't have enough of either, you get mist or nothing. Now, I see you ready to say it's the proper emotions that cause that, right? Well, aren't emotions just another form of intent? They have their own kind of power to them. Happy, sad, anger, hate; they carry their own intent in a way.

"The Unforgivables carry with them a life sentence because they are driven by intent. You cannot accidentally cast one. You must want to kill, to hurt, or to control another. A person can fight off two of them. The Imperius is the easiest to fight off if you want to call it that. I can't fight it off. It would take someone quite a bit weaker than me casting it before I could fight it off. The Cruciatus Curse would be next. I have heard of only a few people in all of history who were able to fight off

the effects of the curse and that is more rumour than fact as far as I can tell.

“I know you have felt that one, Harry. I know that You-Know-Who had you under it. I know it hurts, but he’s probably the worst there is with that spell. You lived through it, but I thought I was going to die when we had our test with that one. I am very in tune with my body. It’s part of being a Metamorph. It hurt me worse than the others.”

“Bellatrix is pretty good with it too. I, I, everything we talk about stays between us, right?” Tonks nodded her head. “I tried it on her, you know. After she killed Sirius I wanted her to hurt. I felt I’d earned the right. I was justified in using it, but it didn’t work properly. It only lasted a few seconds and then she was on her feet again. She mocked me and proceeded to give me a lesson in how to use the curse. I’ll remember that lesson next time I meet her.”

Harry had become more vengeful as he spoke. The room seemed to cool as his mood got darker. Tonks felt the power in his voice. It was palpable. She didn’t know whether to agree with him or talk him out of it. He’d just admitted to using an Unforgivable. A teenager had cast an Unforgivable Curse, with little to no training, and he did it against one of the most accomplished witches in recent history.

“Harry, I am surprised that you were able to cast the spell at all. Anger doesn’t drive it. You have to have the intent and power to cast the spell, but to sustain it you must stay focused on your intent and the result. The spell is very complex and you managed it, at least a little, on a very dangerous person. My aunt has killed and tortured so many people in her life. The fact that you survived the experience means a lot in my book.

“Harry, I’m going to tell you how I live my life as an Auror. It’s the same thing soldiers live by. I’m going home at the end of the day. I’m going to live through this. I fight for myself, but I fight for my buddy, too. I fight, because he fights. I win, because he wins. In the end, after it’s all over, if I live and my buddy lives, I did the right thing.

“Do you regret what you did, Harry?”

“No, I only wish that it had worked better that’s all. I want her to hurt. I want to see her suffer. She ended a good man’s life that day and she was happy about it. I want her to know what it feels like to hurt that much. She told me I had to enjoy it, but the way you explained it makes more sense. I think I could cast it on her again if I get the chance. I hope it’s soon though.” Harry wore a vengeful look on his face as his mind drifted back to Sirius falling through the veil.

“Well, on that happy note, back to magical ability. The duration and affect of a spell is dependant mostly on your power. The more powerful you are, the longer the spell lasts. Transfiguring an object will only last a certain length of time for most people. Conjuring is the best example of this. Conjuring something takes a lot of power, which is why not many people can do it very well. The size of the object also affects the power needed and the time it lasts.

“This is why we buy our clothes instead of conjuring them. Nasty surprise for all when your spell fails, eh? Well, maybe not for the women, but you get my meaning. Same for food too. Your body wouldn’t do well if things started disappearing inside of it. Any questions?”

“No, it all makes sense to me. So, what do I have a lot of?” A refocused Harry asked, wanting to reassure himself of the mechanics.

“You have willpower, that’s undeniable. You have power. I have felt it a couple times and your spell work is example enough. You have intent when it’s needed. I think it’s safe to say you have all of them, Harry. I wouldn’t want to be on the other end of your wand. You only need to work on using them. Think outside of the Hogwarts’s curriculum tonight and tomorrow. You might just get to practice it a little bit this summer.”

Harry could tell Tonks was holding something back and he wanted to know what it was. He didn’t like to be the last to know things. He stared into her eyes and willed himself to know what she was hiding. He caught a brief image of himself casting spells in a large room with Tonks watching him before he felt himself being mentally pushed out of her mind. The next thing Harry saw was Tonks looking at him.

Tonks felt the slight intrusion on her mind, but didn't know how it had happened. Harry had entered her mind and he did it quite easily. She summed up all her strength and pushed him out of her mind as strongly as she could. Once she had successfully removed Harry from her mind, she found herself breathing heavily and looking at a calm Harry staring at her with a slightly confused look on his face.

"How did you do that?"

"You were hiding something from me and I've had bad experiences with people hiding things from me. I just wanted to know what was going on, and I was in your mind. I apologise, but it just kind of happened."

"Well, you were very good at what you managed to do. It took everything I had to force you out. Were you trying to stay inside my mind?"

"No. Once I figured out what was going on, I just kind of waited for you to throw me out."

"You mean you were just waiting there? You weren't trying to stay and look around?"

"No way. I've had Snape in my head too many times messing about like that. I wouldn't do that to you, Tonks."

"Well, that was willpower, Harry. Your intent got you in the door, but your natural willpower kept you there and made it very hard to remove you. I'm rather skilled at both Legilimency and Occlumency too. If you would like me to help you with it, I can try. I couldn't be any worse than Snape at least."

"Ha, you would be a much better teacher than he could ever be. You don't hate me for one. I'd gladly accept your help, Tonks. I need every bit of it I can get. The explanation about magic helped a lot. Why don't they tell us these things when we start school? It would have helped me quite a bit. I am not much of a book learner. I just do it and figure things out as I go."

"I try my best, Harry. I am glad it helped somewhat." Tonks was happy. She had helped teach Harry something.

"You were brilliant, Tonks. Thank you."

Tonks couldn't help but bounce up and down on the bed a little bit. She was very pleased with herself.

Harry saw it happen in slow motion. The bed squeaked with every bounce. Tonks got a little air with her final bounce and to her detriment shifted her position. Harry knew what was going to happen and watched her land on the edge of the mattress. It registered on her face a moment before gravity took over completely, and Tonks slipped off the edge and fell to the floor with a crash. "Oof. That hurt my bum."

Harry couldn't help but laugh. It was the funniest thing that had happened all day. Harry only laughed louder when Tonks started laughing from the floor. Harry leaned over the bed and offered a hand up. Tonks's gleaming smile told him everything was all right. She took his hand and began to pull herself up.

The door burst open and a very unhappy uncle stood in the doorway, red faced and puffing away like he had just ran up the stairs. Harry turned to the interruption and sighed, realising that the last few hours had gone too well considering his luck. Harry turned back to look at Tonks and found her smile faltering.

"I knew it!" Vernon bellowed. "I knew you were nothing but a whore. I know what you were doing up here with the Boy. I heard the bed squeaking. Don't act like I made it up. I want you out, NOW!"

Harry finished pulling Tonks up onto the bed and stood up to face his uncle. "I warned you to watch what you said to Tonks. You have gone too far, Vernon. You will not speak to her that way. I will not let you." The room dropped in temperature and Harry stepped towards his uncle. "You will apologise, now. Then you will leave us alone. We weren't doing what you suggested. Being fully clothed should have been a hint."

"I will do no such thing, you ungrateful son of a bitch," Vernon roared, but didn't step forward. "I should've chucked you out the day we found you. I knew you would be the ruin of this family. I will not have your kind here anymore. Out, out, OUT!"

"Vernon," called a smallish but curt voice from the hallway. "He's clothed, so they weren't doing, that. They could hurt you if you keep this up. Please, let's go back downstairs." Aunt Petunia stood in the hallway behind Vernon looking small but determined. "You remember when he got mad at Marge. I don't want the same thing to happen to you. Please."

Vernon looked at his wife. He had forgotten about that. The boy did that without his stick and there was another one with him. He was clothed and so was she. He saw her wand pointed at him and it was slightly glowing at the tip. Deciding to make a tactical retreat, Vernon swallowed his words and took three steps out of the room never turning his back on his nephew. Once in the hallway, Vernon took a deep breath, thrust his chest out and went downstairs. Petunia quickly closed the door and hurried after her husband.

"She reasoned with him. She's never done that before. She always let him do whatever he wanted."

"She might have seen what the rest of us noticed a long time ago. Now, do you really understand how magic is used? I tried my best, but I don't know if it worked for you. Everyone's different when it comes to this."

"I get it. It makes sense. The only problem is practicing it and I can't do that here."

"In a few days you might be able to, Harry." Watching his eyebrows shoot up in anticipation, Tonks figured she should clarify a little bit. "I can't say more than that, so don't you go digging around for it. I've still not recovered from the last time. Just practice using your intent and willpower to make your magic happen. Everyone can do a little wandless magic from time to time, and I think you'll be better than average at it. Anyway, wandless magic is untraceable by the Ministry. Now, it's late and you should get to sleep. We talked for a long time about things. If you have any questions, just ask."

“Where are you going to sleep then?” Harry asked looking around his small room. There was only the bed and he was planning to sleep in it.

“I’ll do what I did last night, Harry.” Tonks stared at Harry waiting for him to get ready for bed. “What? Aren’t you going to brush your teeth or something?”

“I’m waiting for your answer actually. Where are you going to sleep?”

“I’m going to bunk with you, of course. Why, do you have a problem with that?”

Harry didn’t know what to do about what Tonks had said. Thinking fast he said, “No, no problem. I just don’t know how you want to do this?”

“Oh, this was so much easier when you were unconscious. You lay down. I lay down. Then we get comfortable and go to sleep. Boy, Harry, you act like you’ve never done this before.”

“I haven’t, Tonks. This will be a first as far as I can remember.”

That was not what Tonks had expected to hear. “You mean to tell me you’ve never slept with a woman? Even the sleeping part?” Harry shook his head confirming what she heard and destroying what she had thought about the Boy-Who-Lived. “I figured you for a lady’s man, Harry. Athlete, cute, hero; you have it all. I figured you to have a long list of ladies waiting to keep you warm at night.”

“Nope. My first shot at a relationship failed spectacularly. I really didn’t have the time to get another one. I doubt many women would want to date someone like me.”

“Oh, no. They would want the ugly ones or maybe an arse.” Tonks smiled letting him know she was just playing around. “You should try, Harry. You’re only young once and Hogwarts is full of women wanting the same thing.”

Trying to turn the tables and save himself from more shame, Harry said what came to mind first. “Speaking from experience, Tonks?”

"Maybe, but that's for me to know and you to find out."

Harry hung his head hiding his red face. *'I set myself up for that one and she took her shot.'* Cutting his losses, Harry left his room and got ready for bed. Tonks laughed to herself. She had got Harry to blush twice in one day. He really wasn't the suave man she had expected. He was more of the clueless young man they all were at that age. When Harry came back, he just stayed near the door.

"Come on, Harry, in you get. I'll just slide in where I can find room." Seeing his disbelief, Tonks grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him to the bed. "Honestly, must the woman show the man everything?"

"I think I've had enough innuendo for the evening, Tonks. Thanks." Harry got into bed and chose the side closest to the door. If his uncle got any crazy ideas and found the courage, Harry would be the first one to get it. Tonks could get away then.

"Settled, Harry?" Tonks took Harry's annoyed look as confirmation and jumped over him to get to the open space. "More than enough room, Harry. If we fit together tonight like we did last night, then there will be enough room for a third if you have someone in mind. Do you?"

"One is enough, thank you. I wouldn't want to get ahead of myself now would I?"

"That's a very mature way of approaching it, Harry. Now if you start getting too frisky, I will let you know by smacking you."

'One step forward, two steps back.' "Thanks for the warning, Tonks. I'll keep that in mind." Harry found himself looking into a pair of dark eyes that didn't seem to stop. He watched her hair lengthen and darken. She had changed into the real Tonks. "Did you do that last night?"

"No, I stayed the same Tonks last night. As a peace offering for my bad behaviour, I will be the real me. Only tonight though or it could become a habit."

Feeling sleep trying to overtake him, Harry couldn't help but think of how nice a place he was in at that very moment. "Thanks, Nymphadora, I appreciate it."

Tonks wanted to yell at him, but she couldn't because he was being sincere. *'Might have overdone the sleeping charm a little bit, but he never would have fallen asleep at the rate his heart was beating.'* Tonks watched Harry sleep for a few minutes before feeling herself beginning to drift off. Testing the link to the wards, she found everything as it should be. The last thought to cross Tonks's mind was how things could change for Harry in the next few days. *'He will be a different person if things happen the way they should. He will see things differently and act differently. Am I doing the right thing by helping him?'*

2. Teasing And The Williams's

Harry awoke to a soft fluttering sound somewhere in front of him. Thinking Hedwig was just trying to get his attention; Harry ignored it and tried to fall asleep again. The sound continued and he knew he couldn't sleep if she needed something. She would land on his head if she had to and those talons hurt.

Opening his eyes, Harry saw dark brown hair obscuring his view. It took him a moment to place it, but he quickly figured out that Hedwig wasn't the reason he was awake. It was the auror that was curled into him that woke him up. Tonks was sleeping and making a quiet rattling sound in her throat as she breathed. Harry couldn't help but smile at how 'new' this situation was to him.

'I like this waking up with someone. It feels good. I slept better than usual, too.' Harry looked around as much as he could without his glasses. The only thing that wasn't blurry was Tonks. He watched her breathe causing her shoulders move slightly. He noticed that she was completely wrapped up by him. He didn't remember doing that, but it must have happened during the night. She seemed happy with the way things were at least by the way she was sleeping. Harry found her rear firmly against his front. He felt himself stir a bit, but fought down those thoughts. *'That is not how I want her to wake up today. There would be no chance fighting that blush.'*

Harry felt a vibration coming from under her pillow. She moved slightly, reaching a hand under the pillow, and the vibration stopped. From her movements, Harry became aware of where his left hand was resting and he didn't know what to do. She had stretched a little reaching for her wand causing his hand to be mashed into her breast.

'Oh, shite. This just gets worse.' Harry was waiting for her to wake up and smack him across the head for his wandering hand. Tonks settled a little bit and seemed to drift off again. Trying his best, Harry slowly moved his hand away from her soft, warm breast and returned it to a safer place. Once he had his hand safely on her hip, he relaxed.

"Just like every other guy, grope and run. I see how you are, Harry." Tonks spoke quietly and it was obvious that she had just woken up, but the playfulness was still there.

Harry didn't know what to do but decided he should apologize for starters. "I am sorry, Tonks. I didn't realize where it was until you moved. I am really..."

"Hush. You did the same thing last night too. No worries, Harry. It felt even better this morning."

"You love this don't you," Harry prompted. "You love being the innocent one in this and making me feel guilty. I see how you are."

"Don't you mean you know how I *feel*? And guilt has nothing to do with it. I am the adult here, Harry. If anyone should feel guilty, it would be me. But me being me, I don't feel guilty at all. I rather liked it in all honesty. I could go another turn if you would like?" Tonks took this moment to roll over and look into Harry's eyes. She saw him fighting a pitched battle between embarrassment and the desire to take her up on her offer. "I am a tease, Harry. I can't help it either. As you get to know me, you will learn when I am playing, when I am serious, and when I am both. Take a guess which it is right now?"

"I think I will keep what little dignity I have left and hold my tongue, thank you."

"Sure you don't want me to hold it for you? At least I didn't wake up with you trying to spear me in the back." Tonks knew she was going a little too far, but she couldn't help it. She enjoyed it too much and Harry was all sorts of fun.

"Never mind about the dignity, I think you just ran that over with a hippogriff." Harry took a deep breath and settled himself for a second. "I believe I will get up, er, out of bed before you can humiliate me any more than you already have. Don't you have some Order member to meet soon?"

"Yes, but it is just Dung and he will be late as usual. Besides, this is far more entertaining."

"I am glad I can amuse you, Tonks. If you keep this up, I may just start doing the same thing to you. What would you do then, huh?"

"I eagerly await the day, Harry Potter. Maybe then you will finally figure out if I am playing or serious or both." Tonks thought she had won the battle, but she noticed a twinkle in Harry's eyes that was far too reminiscent of a certain headmaster.

"Careful what you wish for, Nymphadora. You may get what you ask for."

Hesitating a second, Tonks spoke very softly, "It's Tonks to you, Harry." *'Oh, Merlin, I may have gone too far. He might have me figured out and that twinkle should be outlawed. Stay strong, he is probably just trying to spook you.'*

Harry saw her hesitate. He knew she wasn't sure of things right now. That was the opportunity he needed to save face. He leaned forward and kept his face as blank as possible. This was the crucial moment and he could stuff it up. "You didn't say anything about it last night. Why the sudden change?" Harry gave her a playful smirk and eased out of the bed slowly. *'Leave them wondering. That was what Wood had said second year after he kissed that blond during the party. "Leave them wondering and they can't get enough, Harry."*

Harry grabbed some clothes from the bureau and left for the loo to wash up. He never noticed Tonks let out a huge breath and swallow nervously. She quickly gathered her wand from under the pillow. Righting her clothes and waving her wand over them to get the wrinkles out, Tonks apparated outside to meet Dung.

'Yep, he called my bluff and I folded. Now I can only wait and see what he does about it. I hate not being in control, but what can I do about it.' Her musings were interrupted by a drunken slob appearing next to her.

"As covert as Hagrid, you are. Are you sure you can handle this task, Dung? I mean even with the cloak you are obvious to anyone who happens to have a pulse."

"What got your knickers in a bunch 'tis morning, Tonksy? Boyfriend not doing his job? That time 'o tha month?"

“Watch it, git. I know where you live; alley, trashcan, and all. Now, same as yesterday, watch the fat one. We nearly had a killing last night. I don’t think he can be taught. Maybe all the cholesterol gets in the way.”

“I’ll do me best, Tonksy, you know tha’.”

“I will be back at six or before. You heard about the change, right?”

“Yeah, I ‘eard. Thanks ‘bout tha’. I hate tha daytime. Looking forward to dark again.”

“Later, Dung.” And with that, Tonks apparated away.

Harry returned to his bedroom without meeting up with any of the Dursleys. He found Tonks gone, which wasn’t a surprise at all. *‘Thank Merlin she is gone. I doubt I could have kept up what I was doing before.’* Left with little to do now that Tonks was gone, he saw Hedwig asleep in her cage and the remains of a mouse at the bottom waiting for him to clear them away.

‘Huh, decisions, decisions. Clean her cage or eat something?’ Harry pulled up the loose floorboard and pulled out a bag of crisps that he had hidden. *‘Not the best thing for breakfast, but it will do for now.’*

Harry looked around his room and decided that he may as well practice what Tonks had told him last night. He decided that levitating a book would be a good place to start. He grabbed his copy of ‘Quidditch Through The Ages’ out of his trunk and set it on his desk.

‘OK, it is just willpower and intent. I can do this. I have done this so it isn’t a big deal. Just do the spell so we can move on.’ Harry tried to will the book to levitate. Then he tried to add some intent to the feat.

Half an hour later, Harry found himself with a head ache and the book in the same place mocking him. Harry thought about how Tonks had explained it. The words were triggers and so were the wand movements. He also remembered her saying that anger was an affective trigger for him.

'Fine, I will anger this bloody thing to move.' He tried getting mad at the book but nothing happened. He tried focusing his anger of Voldemort and Bellatrix at the book, but he had to stop when smoke started to rise from the cover. *'Well, this is working out well. If I needed to light a cigarette, I might just have something.'*

Harry thought about everything he had tried so far that didn't work. *'If focusing didn't work, maybe trying something more abstract might work better.'* Harry chose to let go of the specifics and just think of it moving. Nothing elaborate, just make it happen as if it was nothing unusual.

After a few minutes, Harry felt a movement inside of himself. He didn't know what it was, but it was a movement nonetheless. He felt 'it' move from himself to the book, and he was shocked to find the book levitating in midair.

"Ha, I did it. So that is what it feels like. I guess I have never had time to feel it before. I just made it happen." Harry tried the process again only willing the book to lower. Nothing happened.

'Try to recreate the feeling again and then direct it to the book. Maybe I work in reverse. Tonks did say that everyone was different.' He created the feeling again and pushed it to the book. The book lowered as he wanted it to.

"Now, I just need to get faster and more accurate at this. My goal for the day is to have four spells down wandlessly before Tonks gets back. That shouldn't be too hard and I have all day to do it." Harry looked to Hedwig who was still sleeping soundly. "So much for you listening to me."

Over the next four hours, Harry got a lot faster at willing the book to levitate. He moved it up and down and side to side around the room. Hedwig had voiced her disapproval once when the book got away from Harry and nearly hit her. Harry apologized for the next hour levitating treats to her trying to make up for it.

He also practiced summoning things to himself. Memories of a lost wand in an alley forced him to be sure he would never find himself wandless for very long. The vanishing spell was practiced too.

Hedwig's cage no longer contained parts of a mouse or owl droppings.

Harry couldn't think of another spell to practice that was easy but important to staying alive. He knew offensive spells would be good ones to practice, but he wasn't sure if the Ministry could detect those kinds of spells wandless or not. Besides, damaging the Dursley's house wouldn't make things easier for him at all. After tossing the idea around in his head, Harry chose the silencing spell. It would be really useful when he was wondering around Hogwarts this year.

Harry's hunger broke his concentration shortly after he had perfected silencing his steps. *'I guess it is time to test Aunt Petunia again. I wonder how she will react this time.'*

Harry opened his door and listened for sounds. Hearing nothing, Harry went downstairs and slowly opened the kitchen door finding his aunt and Dudley sitting at the table. Dudley was quiet because he was eating a rather thick sandwich and Petunia was still reading the book about him. Deciding that it was now or never, Harry entered the kitchen and headed directly for the food that was laid out on the counter.

Dudley paused gnawing on his food and followed Harry with his eyes. Harry noticed what Dudley was doing but chose not to show that he had. Harry wanted to be in and out as fast as he could and didn't want any distractions. One third of the day had passed pleasantly and he wanted to keep it that way.

With two pieces of bread laid out, Harry slapped down cheese and turkey and made his sandwich. Grabbing an apple, Harry made for the door only to find a glaring cousin staring him down. Harry stared back for a few seconds before continuing towards the door and safer rooms.

"What do you think you are doing?" Asked Dudley. "Mum, he is taking food. He can't do that, can he?"

"Leave him be, Duddy-kins," Petunia said as nicely as she could. "Do you want more, Harry?" Harry shook his head.

Dudley nearly fell off his bench when his mother asked if Harry wanted more food. He had never heard those words directed at Harry before. "Mum, what in the hell are you doing? Are you touched in the head? H...he...he didn't put a spell on you did h...he..?"

"Enough of that talk, Popkin," Petunia chided softly. "Are you sure, Harry?"

"Yes, quite sure, Aunt Petunia," Harry answered.

"Can I," Petunia began, but didn't seem to know how to finish. "Did you really?" Petunia paused and seemed not to know how to continue.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Did you really duel the man who killed Lily?"

"Yes, I did. I almost died doing it, too. If you ever see him, run. You don't stand a chance against him and he will kill you without a moment's thought."

"How did you fight him? How could you beat him?"

"I didn't beat him," Harry couldn't believe he was having this conversation. "I ran before he could kill me."

"Ha, coward," Dudley said.

"If you ever see him, Dud, you would probably fall over yourself trying to run away. When it comes to Voldemort, there is no such thing as being a coward. You are either alive or, like most people, dead."

"How many people have fought him and lived?" Petunia asked with a shaky voice.

"Two that I know of," Harry answered. "Dumbledore is the only other one I know of who has fought Voldemort face-to-face and is still alive."

"You are the only other person who has?"

"Yes, Aunt Petunia, I am the only other person who has lived when Voldemort decided to kill them. Hence, the hero thing I guess."

"Mum, what in the devil is he talking about?" Dudley asked, but saw his mother staying silent. "Mum?"

"How many times have you faced him?"

"You want a list?" Seeing Petunia nod, Harry listed them off. "One year old, Mum and Dad died, I lived. First year, twice, but he was not in a human form. Second year, once, but he was a memory from the diary. Fourth year, once in the graveyard, but he was in human form then. Fifth year, once in the atrium to the Ministry. So, that makes it six times I have faced him and lived. Anything else you want to know?"

"Um, do you have a book explaining Quidditch? This one doesn't give any details about it. It just recaps of your matches."

Harry nodded and willed his copy of 'Quidditch Through The Ages' to come to him. The book came flying through the air shortly afterwards and Harry caught it. Petunia gave a slight shriek and Dudley looked happy.

"You did magic," Dudley cackled. "You are going to get chucked out now."

"No, Dud, I am not. I did wandless magic and they can't trace it. I am still new at it, but so far things are going well for me. Would you like me to levitate you around the room?"

Dudley watched a smile grow on Harry face. From the look of things, Harry was sure of himself and Dudley didn't like that. "No, that is OK. I prefer to stay on the ground, thank you."

"Your choice, Dud." Harry was glad Dudley hadn't forced his hand on the issue. He wasn't sure he could control Dudley if he got him off the ground. Harry handed Petunia the book and watched her look at the cover. She really seemed interested in it. Still not trusting her, Harry wrote off his impressions. *'The tabloids are just really boring right now. This is probably the next closest thing for her.'*

Harry scanned the room quickly then headed for his room with the sandwich in hand and the apple floating after him. The kitchen was silent after Harry left. Dudley stared at his mum not sure what to think.

"Mummy, what is going on?"

"I read some things about Harry that are hard to believe. If they are true, then our treating him the way we have been could be really dangerous. I have just finished a book about him and I am still trying to figure out which is real and which is fiction."

"A book, about him? Why would anyone write a book about, him?"

"Here," Petunia handed the book to Dudley, "read that and I think you will see why they wrote a book about him. Either way, I do not need to remind you to keep this from your father, do I?"

"Like I would mention any of this to him? As fun as it would be to see him get mad, I think Harry and his bitch would hurt, Dad."

"Don't say that about her. I may not like her either, but Harry seems to and after you read that, you won't want him mad at you. Now, keep it well hidden, OK, Diddy?"

"Yes, Mum. I will." Dudley grabbed at the book and found a smiling Harry looking up at him. The picture moved a bit and Dudley nearly dropped the book. "Mummy, it moved."

"I know, Diddy. Their pictures move. It is just one more thing that makes them different from us. Try not to let it bother you, Popkin. Some of the pictures can't be real, but they are in there. A dragon chasing 'Him' around on a broom, far fetched fiction if you ask me, but the book made it seem 'normal'."

"A dragon? They aren't real. We would have seen them if they were."

"You would think so, but no one else knows about...them and their ways, do they?" Petunia said looking scared.

'What in the hell is going on here? What happened and what did Tonks do to her?' Harry couldn't believe what was going on in

Number Four. Not once in his life had anything similar occurred. *‘Let it go. Worrying about it won’t get you an answer. Ask Tonks when she gets here. Now, I should eat and then continue practicing. It was fun to scare them with that Summoning charm and I need new things to torment them with.’*

Harry ate and reviewed all the spells he had worked on earlier. Proving to himself that he had them down, Harry chose four others to learn. Since he had already achieved his goal for the day, everything else was a bonus.

Harry spent the next four hours learning and mastering more spells wandlessly. He practiced his flame spell on a small candle he had brought from Hogwarts. He avoided setting his room on fire thankfully. Harry decided that if he knew how to set things on fire, then he should be able to prevent himself from getting burned so he worked on the Flame Freezing charm. The switching spell worked after he had practiced for over an hour on it. The Freezing charm caused Harry some difficulty. He found that missing the target and hitting the wall with the spell caused the paint to flake off faster than normal although it was hard to tell in his room.

With several rough spots on the wall from practicing, Harry heard noise from downstairs. He didn’t know who it was, but it was too early for Tonks to be back. He opened his door and listened. He heard voices but they were too quiet to understand. Harry decided to test out his new magic and cast the Silencing spell on his feet. He crept to the top of the stairs and listened.

The voice seemed familiar but he couldn’t place it. Harry wished he had a pair of Extendable Ears handy so he could hear what was going on downstairs. With few options, Harry took a deep breath and descended the stairs and saw someone standing in the living room. Crouching a little, Harry saw the back of a worn cloak that had been repaired a few times. Knowing who was visiting, he thought about whether he really wanted to talk to him or not.

Hanging his head in defeat, Harry walked the rest of the way down the stairs and into the living room. He stood directly behind Remus

listening to the conversation he was having with Aunt Petunia. No one had heard him enter the room.

"I don't want you here anymore than the other one?" Petunia asked while trying to remain snobbish as best she could.

"Now, Petunia, I just want a short visit with Harry," Remus explained. "I will be gone before Mr. Dursley arrives, I assure you."

"Good. Two of them are too many. The last thing I need or want is more of your kind here."

"Why thank you for your hospitality, Petunia," Remus forced as nicely as he could. "Now I will just go up to his room and speak with him."

"I am right here, Professor Lupin," Harry made himself known. Remus turned and smiled a sad smile.

"I didn't hear you, Harry. No wonder you can get up to so much trouble at school if you are that quiet. You know my ears are sharper than most."

"Even more than a bat's or an old man's? Not to sound rude, but why are you here, Professor?"

"It is Remus, Harry," Remus said softly. "I haven't been your teacher for a few years and I see you as an equal so Remus is just fine."

"Fine, Remus, why are you here?"

"Well, I think we should go somewhere private for this. I am sure you would prefer it considering what I have to say."

"What is it about?" Harry asked beginning to lose patience with being told where to go by another of his captors.

"Sirius," was the only word Remus spoke waiting for a reaction.

"Ah, OK, I see your point. My room then?" Harry said not waiting for an answer. He turned and walked up to his room after discretely

removing the Silencing charm from his feet. *'I don't want to advertise anything yet. They can all find out on their own.'*

Entering his room, Harry wondered what Remus could be up to. Most things could have been sent by post or through Tonks. As Remus followed Harry upstairs, Harry wondered how important this conversation was going to be and what it was about. Once the door closed, Harry looked at Remus and waited for him to start. He watched the werewolf look around the room and the large bed seemed to peak his attention. A clearing of Harry's throat caused the older man to look him in his eyes.

"Harry, you look well. Have you been sleeping and eating OK?" Remus prompted nervously.

"Why are you here?" Harry wasn't going to play this game. He wanted to know what was going on and he wanted to know fast.

"OK, well, I am here to discuss Sirius. I know you would rather not, but certain things must be talked about. I miss him as much as you do, Harry. Maybe more so, but that is not the main reason I am here. In the next few days you should receive something from Gringotts concerning Sirius's estate. I didn't want it to catch you off guard so I came to tell you in person.

"I know you are in his will, Harry. You are going to get most of it too. I wanted to tell you that life goes on. Sirius would want you to take his stuff and cause as much mayhem as you could with it at least that was his plan when his mother died. I also wanted to tell you that you didn't cause any of it to happen. You have no reason to feel guilty."

Harry merely stared at his father's friend. This was the last thing he wanted to deal with right now. He didn't want any of Sirius's stuff and he wanted to think about it even less. Sighing, Harry knew he had little choice in the matter.

"Fine," Harry said evenly fighting his anger and sadness. "Anything else?"

Remus was not surprised by Harry's attitude. He understood the emotions he was dealing with. They were the same ones he, himself,

had dealt with years ago when their lives were destroyed that Halloween night.

"If you need to talk about things, Harry, I am here for you."

"Ha, you mean you are somewhere else for me. I am the only one 'here'. Hedwig is here too, but she doesn't talk much her being an owl and all."

"I know you are hurting, Harry, but things will get..."

"Stop," Harry didn't want to hear it. "I don't want your sympathy or your words of advice. I will get through this like I have everything else, in my own way." Harry didn't voice what he was really thinking *'I am going to get that bitch one way or another. That is my way, at least when it comes to this subject.'*

Remus looked worried and happy all at the same time. He wasn't sure how to take what Harry had said. He could have meant any number of things by that statement.

"I hope you are OK, Harry. Try not to dwell on this too much. I speak from experience when I say that nothing good can come of it."

"Yes, but when you had your experience everyone was dead or in prison. So you could never really do anything about it could you? I don't have that problem. Everyone I need to deal with is still alive." Harry stopped himself from saying any more. He knew he had to think clearly and not let his emotions take over. He figured he could make a book float pretty easily at this point but chose not to practice that spell. "Remus, if there is nothing else, I would really like to be alone right now. Thank you for telling about this. I will look for the owl."

Remus watched the young man wrestle with his feelings. He knew Harry had a long road to travel before he would get over what had happened. "I understand, Harry. Try and think of the good things, OK. Sirius died on his feet. He always wanted to go that way. Or under a good woman, but I am sure you don't want to hear about that. I know I didn't, but Sirius made sure to describe it in great detail whenever

he got bored.” Remus smiled sadly as he remembered the many times Sirius had told those stories.

“Thanks for that picture, Remus. I doubt I will be able to get to sleep tonight. Now, if you are quite finished corrupting my mind...”

“Yes, I think I am quite finished. Thank you for listening, Harry. Remember the good times, OK? I will show myself out.” Remus turned and left the room. He walked down the stairs and out the front door.

Harry heard the telltale crack of apparation. His mood turned sourer than it had been before. He had anger coursing through him and he needed to direct it somewhere. He knew he couldn’t do magic right now, because he would get himself into trouble. No other options coming to mind, Harry decided to head to the park thinking that maybe a walk would clear his mind or at least he could get away from Privet Drive for a few minutes.

Leaving the house was easy and the walk to the park went quickly. The swings had been repaired while he had been at Hogwarts so he sat on one and gave a great heave with his feet. He pumped once trying to force out as much anger as he could without letting his magic kick in. Harry watched as the view of the park tilted and he was staring at the clouds overhead. The view swung back to one that was the park and so on as he swung lower each time.

Movement from underneath a small bush caught his attention after he had settled to a gentle back-and-forth motion. He saw a bushy tail flick out of sight. “As if one wasn’t enough, I have a second minder. Are you after me or are you minding my minder?”

A furry face poked out from the bush and mewed at him. Harry decided that meant both since he knew Dung’s reliability was questionable at best. Harry watched a pair of kids enter the far end of the park. They must have been new to the area since they were in the park around the time Dudley and his gang would come by and cause problems with the other kids. The property damage happened after dark.

The boy and girl had to be brother and sister judging by the way the boy would tease her. He never had to say or do much to get her after him swinging her fist. They climbed the slide and spun the merry-go-round. Harry wondered what it would be like to have a brother or sister. He wondered if his mum and dad had thought about having more kids before Voldemort killed them.

Knowing those thoughts were not the best ones to think about, Harry watched the kids more. They had to be around eight and six, maybe nine and seven. The girl would follow her brother around and do what he did until he made her mad. The teasing was a lot like how the twins would tease Ron or Ginny without the explosions of course. They seemed happy together and that was something foreign to Harry. He had never had sibling to love and be mad at. He only had Dudley and there was never more than anger, hate, and loathing between them.

As he watched, the girl slipped and fell near the see-saw. She tried not to cry, but she wasn't doing very well. She was in pain and was holding her arm. The brother had stopped what he was doing and ran to her side. He was worried about her, but he didn't know what to do. His uncertainty was causing her to cry harder. She was getting scared because her older brother was getting scared.

Harry stood up and started walking towards them. He thought about how things worked for him. As he thought about it, Hermione was the closest thing he had to a sister. She was an older sister most of the time. She always made him do his homework. She nagged him to keep trying to do better and follow the rules. She did her best to help him in her own way. She believed in adults. She always had trust in them. They had always helped her in her life. Her parents were good people. They loved her and cared about her. They believe her and in her. She never had to manage on her own.

Harry also realized that she was a younger sister sometimes, too. Whenever the books and her knowledge failed her, she was lost. When she was lost, she turned to Harry to help her, to make the decisions, and to fix things. When things got difficult, Hermione turned to him to make them right. He knew that in most situations, he had no clue what he was doing. He would just do something and

things would usually work out. When faced with trouble, if he ran one way, she would follow him without question. If it was a real problem, she would follow his lead giving help along the way.

He thought about all the times they had gotten in over their heads. Every time, they made it because they worked together. Harry led because he was willing to make the choice and see it through. Hermione would sit back and think the problem through. If she didn't have the time to do that, she would wait for Harry to lead. She was the sister he never had growing up. She could drive him crazy just by trying to make him better, but when it came down to it, she followed where he led.

Looking at the kids, he could see that he always did something when it needed done. Right or wrong, he always made a decision. Hermione just made sure he didn't muck it up too bad.

"Are you alright?" Harry asked the little girl. She was fighting her tears, but she was losing. The brother just watched not knowing how to help.

"I fell and my arm hurts," the little girl said.

"Are your parents nearby?" Harry asked.

"They are at home," the brother said. "Down that way," he pointed down Magnolia Road.

"Let me see your arm, OK. I will be as gentle as I can, alright?"

The girl nodded and moved her right arm that was covering her injured left. Harry saw a bump growing on the side of her forearm and it was bruising quickly. Harry thought it might be broken, but he wasn't sure. He didn't remember his first broken arm very well and the other time his bones were no longer there.

"Do you think you can walk?" Harry asked the girl. She shook her head slowly. "OK, do you want me to carry you home then?" She nodded after looking at her brother who shrugged his shoulders.

Harry picked her up carefully and she settled into his arms quietly sniffing every now and then. Harry told the boy to lead the way. Harry

followed him across the park and down Magnolia Road. He watched the brother and saw the fear in his eyes. Harry wondered why someone would be so scared of a possible broken arm. As he thought, he realized that to normal people, a broken arm was a big deal. Harry almost laughed when he compared a broken arm to his list of injuries. It would be quite a ways down the list.

As they walked, Harry thought about Ron. He could be the brother Harry never had in much the same way Hermione was a sister. Ron could make him laugh easily enough. He could also annoy him and make him angry. Ron had a problem with money and jealousy. Being the youngest boy in a family of men would explain the jealousy issues. He was always last in things and he became a friend to Harry Freaking Potter. *'Good choice, Ron.'*

Ron was also self-conscious of his financial situation. Harry never had money growing up. He learned he had a vault full of money when he was eleven but by then it didn't make any difference. For Harry, it was one less worry on his list of worries. Ron could get angry at Harry for the slightest of things and then it would be fine. He could make him laugh by doing something stupid or just very Ron-like.

Growing up so alone, Harry had somehow managed to accumulate a brother and a sister along the way. He didn't know how he had done it but he had. Looking at the little girl in his arms and wondered if his dad would have done this for him. *'Mum probably would have yelled at him for letting me get hurt and then fixed it with her wand in a second.'*

Harry was broken out of his thoughts by a nasty comment. "Oi, Potter. First you go for the older ones and now you are robbing the cradle. Can't you get enough?"

Harry slowed and found Dudley, Piers, Dennis, Gordon, and Malcolm standing in the way he was headed. Dudley had made the comment, but it looked like he was forced to say it by the others. The gang was quietly prodding Dudley to say something else.

"You are sick to think something like that, Dud. My guess it was really Piers who said it, though. Seems like something he would say

knowing how he likes them 'young'. Now, if you will excuse us, I have to get a hurt kid to her parents."

"Watch it, Potter," Piers said. "I should cut your heart out for what you said." Piers pulled a knife out of his pocket and flipped it open.

Dudley looked at the knife and at Harry. He seemed unsure what to do. His friends expected him to beat Harry up anytime they found him out of the house and Dudley knew his mum told him to leave Harry alone. He remembered what Harry had done to his father and the magic he had performed earlier. The book his mother had given him was in his room unopened.

Harry didn't want the kids to get caught between Dudley's gang and himself. He decided to postpone the confrontation if he could. "If you give me a couple minutes, Piers, I will come back and let you try. I doubt you could do it though. More dangerous people than you have tried the same thing and they haven't managed it yet. So, let me take care of current matters and then we can settle our differences later."

Harry began walking normally again and followed the little boy around the group. The girl had hidden her head as much as she could when the gang had started making threats and she was keeping her head down. Harry hoped he could get away without having to fight anyone.

Malcolm chose that moment to make a comment. "Think you could take us, Potter? Sounded like a challenge to me, Piers. Watcha goin' to do about it?"

Harry sighed and kept on walking. If the house was close enough, he might get away without anyone else getting hurt or himself in trouble.

"I am going to kill you, Potter," Piers said coldly.

Harry stopped and turned slowly trying to put forth the most intimidating look he could manage. "Are you sure you want to try, Piers?" Harry said every word slowly and with emphasis. "Others have said the same things. I am still here so what do you think happened to them?" Harry made eye contact with every member of the gang. He held Piers' and Dudley's gaze the longest. Harry gave one last sweeping glance as he turned to follow the little boy again.

He never turned around to see what Dudley's gang did about his comment. He made it all the way to Wisteria Walk before anything was said. The little girl looked up at him calmly and said, "You can be scary when you need to, don't you? I feel safe with you though. You don't scare me."

"Thank you, I think." Harry wasn't sure how to take the comment. It seemed good and bad all at the same time. They walked down a couple of houses and the boy ran up the sidewalk to a house with a red door. He opened the door and yelled for his mum and dad. Harry walked up the path slowly watching for parents and Dudley's gang not to mention any Death Eaters that might be after him.

The door opened quickly and a woman ran out with the boy following her closely. Harry smiled at the woman and carefully let the girl down onto her own feet. He waited to see what the mother would do, not having much experience with this kind of thing.

The woman knelt in front of her daughter and asked her what happened. She explained everything quickly and showed her injuries to her mother. Harry saw the love in the woman's eyes and wished he could remember that from his own mother. The woman checked the worst injury and sighed deeply. She asked the boy to run inside and tell his father that they needed to go to hospital right away. The boy ran into the home again and Harry could hear him yelling the instructions. He watched the girl get a careful hug from her mother.

Harry turned and began walking back to Privet Drive and his 'prison' that awaited him there. He felt movement behind him and turned quickly to see the mother walking up to him. She had a grateful but worried look on her face. Harry wasn't sure what was going to happen, but he was ready for it all the same.

"Thank you for helping Emma get home. I don't know how to repay you."

"No big deal, ma'am. You are welcome."

"Some boys threaten to kill him, Mum. They scared me." The little girl was standing behind her mother cupping her arm.

“Don’t worry about them, Emma. I have dealt with worse.” Harry smiled at Emma and her mother, then turned to leave again.

“Did they really threaten your life or was it just words?” The woman asked.

“They were serious, but all the same it isn’t a big deal. I am not worried. They are nothing compared to what I am used to dealing with.”

Harry nodded at the mother and Emma and then walked down the street. He made it to Privet Drive without any problems until he got a weird feeling that something wasn’t right. He spun on his heels and pulled his wand from its hiding place keeping it concealed but useable. He scanned the street looking for anything that could be a threat. He waited until he heard movement to his left.

He swung his wand to the side and dove forward hitting someone squarely in the chest. The fabric of an invisibility cloak felt familiar and the girlish-oof told Harry all he needed to know.

“Wotcher, Tonks,” Harry said causally regaining his feet. “You might want to avoid sneaking up on me next time. You could have gotten yourself hurt.”

“Oh, that is most definitely going to leave a mark, Harry. You are abusive you know that. Get inside so I can take this stupid thing off and check for damage.”

“Right this way, Nymphadora.” Harry hurried his pace to avoid any possible attack she could launch at him outside. He opened the door and waited for the sound of feet on the stairs before closing the door. He quickly followed the sound of Tonks climbing the stairs. She didn’t have the same spring to her step that she usually did though but at least she wasn’t falling down again.

His door opened and he heard the sound of cloth being moved. He entered his room and closed the door seeing Tonks undoing her outer cloak. She dropped her grey cloak on top of the invisibility cloak which was piled near the foot of his bed. Harry was about to make a comment about her undressing when she continued her efforts. She

pulled her shirt out of her pants and undid the buttons for them. Holding her shirt up and exposing her flat belly, she pulled down on the back part of her pants revealing the upper part of her shapely rear. She turned slightly and caught sight of herself in the mirror on the inside of Harry bureau. She scowled a little, but Harry couldn't take his eyes away from her exposed flesh.

"See, I told you it was going to leave a mark," she cried out. "How could you attack me like that? I was only going to tickle you." Tonks turned showing Harry the red mark on her lower back and upper butt. "I landed on a rock, I am sure of it. Hurt too." Only now did Tonks notice how big Harry's eyes were. She figured she could use this to embarrass him again since last time hadn't worked out very well.

"Like what you see, Harry? Would you like to touch it? Maybe kiss it and make it better." She caught a slight reddening before it disappeared.

'She loves every minute of this. I am not going to fold this time. I am going to show her not to tease me.' Harry raised his eyes and stared right at Tonks. He waited a few seconds before speaking watching how she reacted to his stare.

"If you insist, Tonks, I won't mind taking a closer look." Harry cocked his eyebrows as he finished. *'Keep it up. You have watched the twins and Seamus do this to other girls before. It is all about confidence and perseverance.'* He watched as her mouth opened slightly and made an 'oh' look. *'Got you.'*

"Well, are you going to let me have a look at it or are you going to keep parading around my room showing off your blue knickers?" Harry used whatever he had in him to keep a straight face while he waited for her response. He didn't expect her reaction though.

Tonks closed her mouth and seemed to make a decision. She took a step forward and turned giving him a perfect view of the injury. She held his eyes for a while, but then looked down at the scrape.

"It still hurts and I may need your help healing it. My first aid spells are basic at best and I am not used to doing them on myself."

Harry looked at the scrape and saw the skin had been torn slightly and the bruise was still growing slowly. He couldn't help but notice the smooth skin she had on her hip and back and that beautiful rump. He swallowed before saying anything. "What can I do to help, Tonks?"

Tonks was surprised at how well he handled the current situation. "I will need you to direct my wand around the area in a circular motion. It has to be a fluid motion or it won't work. I can do the spell, but the location is hard to reach and still have control."

"I will do what I can, Tonks, just show me how."

"Gladly, Harry." Tonks made a point of emphasizing the word 'gladly'. She was awarded with a small twitch from Harry showing he read between the lines as intended. She rolled up the front of her shirt and tucked it up keeping it out of the way. Then she pulled her pants further down showing even more of her blue underwear. She saw Harry swallow twice and force his eyes away from her special areas.

'Oh, this is too much fun. I may have lost the war of words to him, but I own the visual war without question.'

"Harry, I need you to hold my wand lightly and move it around in a slow, smooth circle around the wound. Don't worry about doing any magic since it is my wand and I know what to do." Tonks waited for Harry to grab her wand and begin the motion. He had a problem keeping the wand over the specified area though.

"Tonks, you keep moving every time you move the wand. How am I going to keep it over the wound like you said?"

"That is for you to figure out, Harry. I have to concentrate on the spell."

Left with few options, Harry put a hand on her opposite hip and held her body steady and continued the circular motions.

Tonks concentration broke as she felt that safe feeling return. She couldn't explain it, but she just felt safe with him. It was more powerful than when they had been sleeping, but it was still the same feeling.

Where his hand was touching her hip, she felt a warm sensation. *'I may win the visual war, but he kicks my arse when it comes to touching. Oh, those hands of his. Stop it! You need to concentrate or this will take all day. Would that be a bad thing?'*

Tonks used some Occlumency skills to calm herself and focused on the task at hand. She managed to heal her wounds in a few minutes with Harry's help. She stopped her wand from moving and tossed it on the bed. She looked where the wound had been and found her unblemished skin glowing from the setting sun. She looked up and found Harry still looking at her body.

"Like what you see, Harry? Maybe if you are nice I might let you look more later." Harry's eyes snapped up and look right at her. She didn't know what it was but that stare was penetrating. "All joking aside, thank you for helping me; back to joking, it is your fault I got hurt in the first place."

"You were going to attack me. What did you expect?"

"Not to get caught, that is what I expected! I showed up about the same time that girl got hurt. Well done on that, by the way. Always the hero aren't you."

"I did what I thought was best at the time. I only hope her arm isn't broken. Muggles have to wait a month or longer for bones to heal. I know I had to wait six weeks for my arm to heal after they broke it."

"Who are they?"

"The doctor had to break it since it started healing wrong."

"How did it heal wrong in the first place?" Tonks didn't understand what Harry was saying.

"I didn't get to the doctor for about a week after I broke my arm." Harry hung his head a little trying to avoid eye contact.

"It was those fucking Dursley, wasn't it?" Tonks yelled. "What did they do, ignore the bump on your arm?"

“No, they didn’t really see it. They locked me in my cupboard for a week after it happened. I guess that was some sort of punishment. Aunt Petunia had to take me to the doctor because my arm looked terrible and she didn’t want people talking. The bone had started healing already, but it was crooked. I could have used a little magic that time. I might have healed quicker and Dudley wouldn’t have tried hitting my arm every chance he got.”

Tonks wanted to kill the muggles even more than before. “How in the bloody hell could they have done that to you? How could they do that to anyone?”

“Leave it, Tonks. It is over and done with as far as I am concerned. Now, you were following me since the park?”

“Yup and I was waiting for that idiot to attack you so I could save the savior.” Tonks laughed at her own joke, but Harry scowled.

“If you were there then, why didn’t I sense you were there like I did when I got here?”

“Don’t know. Maybe you were thinking about your ‘other’ woman and didn’t notice me.” Tonks pouted as well as she could while fighting her growing smile.

“Not likely, Tonks. I knew someone was near me when I got back here. You said you were going to attack me?”

“Yeah, I was going to tickle you. I would have done it too, but you decided to knock me over and hurt my bum so you could get a free show.”

“You wanted to get me then. You planned to attack me.”

“Why such a big deal, Harry. People get premonitions all the time. It is called a sixth sense.”

“Because I have had these feelings before. When someone is going to attack me, I seem to know it. Most people probably figure it is just reflexes, but I know when something bad is about to happen to me. I have always known things like that.”

“Something else to bring up,” Tonks said to herself but spoke out loud.

“What was that, Tonks?”

“Nothing, Harry. Now, I want to hear about what you worked on today. I told you to practice some wandless magic so show me what you learned.”

From across the room, Harry levitated a book and summoned it. Tonks gasped and looked at Harry with her surprised look.

“What? You told me to practice and I did. Did I do something wrong?”

“You didn’t use words or hand movements. You also used two different spells.”

“You mean I was supposed to use words while learning wandless magic? I thought you wanted me to do it silently and with no motions.”

“I left you on your own to learn wandless magic. I figured you would start off the easy way doing all of it minus your wand. I didn’t expect you to do it wordless and motionless. You never read ahead did you, Harry?”

“Of course not, that is why I have Hermione. She does the reading, Ron does the worrying, and I do...I just do.”

“That proves your willpower and magical ability at least. OK, so you mastered levitation and summoning. I am impressed that is great work for a day.”

“I learned eight spells today.” Harry listed off the spells. “I am not sure if my freezing spell works though since I only had inanimate objects to practice on.”

Tonks could only shake her head. “How in the name of Merlin could you...no matter. Way to go, Harry. That is better than anyone else I know of.” Tonks thought of a question she wanted to know. “Do you know of any limitations for magic?”

Harry thought and tried to remember. "Well, you can't apparate inside of Hogwarts because of the wards. There is the Killing, no that isn't always right since I am proof of it." Harry thought longer and Tonks seemed to get anxious. "That is the only one I know of, Tonks. Hermione could probably give you a few pages if you really want to know."

"I think I understand you better now, Harry. You only know what you have been told and people haven't told you much. Most probably figure you already know things since you are Harry Potter after all."

"Yeah, like the whole Parseltongue thing second year. How was I to know only dark wizards could talk to snakes. Like I knew I could talk to snakes before that. I had only ever seen one before at the zoo and I kind of forgot about the talking snake bit with everything that happened afterwards."

"You have no idea what we can or can't do based on what others have said. You only know what you can do and what you can't do. On that, what can't you do?"

"Beat Ron at chess for starters. Read more than Hermione or know more than her anyway. Um, apparate inside of Hogwarts. I can't really think of anything else."

Tonks laughed, "You have no idea about the accepted rules for magic. You just go out there and do things. I can tell you that people usually start wandless magic with a prop wand and work down from there. It is rare for anyone to do wandless magic without words and motions. You doing all of it your first day is kind of scary. And the fact that you learned eight spells makes it scarier yet."

"I have been told my entire life I am worthless and I can't do anything. Magic is the one thing I can do that *they* can't. I am not about to prove them right about that too, am I? I am not going to let my mum and dad down either."

Tonks shook her head showing her understanding of Harry's convictions. She knew her life had been very different from Harry's. She always had support from her parents. She never needed to prove her worth to them. They always loved her. Harry never had any

of that. It was a constant struggle for him. Magic was his thing and he seemed to be better at it than anyone else she knew of barring the headmaster and You-Know-Who.

Tonks watched Harry calm down and settle his mind. She could feel his emotions beneath the surface. She felt him battle them for control of his mind and he won the fight. She knew she was using a little Legilimency to read him, but it was necessary to know what he was feeling. She felt his body go rigid and wondered what could have caused it.

Harry realized that he still had his hand on Tonks' hip and her pants were still pulled down to her thighs. He saw the vibrant blue material covering her special places and wondered what she felt like down there. Knowing that Tonks had been using Legilimency on him moments before, he stopped those thoughts immediately.

Clearing his throat, "Ah, Tonks, maybe you should pull your pants up now. I doubt any of the Dursleys would appreciate walking in and seeing us this way. Well, Dudley might, but I would rather not think about that."

Tonks looked down and saw that her pants were still down and her knickers were indeed in full view. Watching Harry's face, she slowly pulled them up trying to see if he was enjoying himself. "Sure you wouldn't rather they be down, Harry? I am sure we could figure out a way to pass the time?"

"Thanks for the offer, Tonks, but I doubt you really want to get involved with a guy like me. You know the whole marked for death thing kind of scares people away."

"You really are ignorant of how people feel aren't you?" Shaking her head again, Tonks forged ahead with her plans for the evening. "I want to help you with your Occlumency, Harry. You will need to have a firm grasp on it if we go ahead with my plans for the summer. It will need to stay absolutely secret from everybody. Are you interested in my idea?"

"I need to learn Occlumency, that is for sure, but I won't know what your plan for the summer is until you tell me. So, what is it?"

“Not now, Harry. You will find out tomorrow if it is going to happen. I should know sometime this evening one way or the other. Now, let’s practice Occlumency. You know the clearing your mind bit, but you don’t know the rest of it. You need to want to keep your mind to yourself, Harry. You have to sense the intrusion and fight it or divert it somewhere safe. A really skilled Occlumens will be able to show the Legilimens what ever he wishes and not be detected. Some people can ward their mind and prevent entrance, but the goal should be to redirect the intruder to false or safe memories. Are you following me?”

“Yes, I understand the goals, but I don’t know how to do it.”

“Willpower is the key, Harry, and you have enough of that. Now, I will cast the spell and you should try to show me safe memories. Only throw me out if you can’t do anything else.”

Tonks cast the spell and began sifting through Harry’s memories. She started in a safe place of his mind concentrating on things he did when he was in first year. She saw the mirror and felt the happiness of seeing his family. Tonks knew she had tears in her eyes after that memory. She moved on to scenes of Quidditch matches and she felt the exhilaration he felt when flying on a broom. Next were conversations he had with Ron and Hermione through out the year. Nothing made sense since everything was out of order, but she heard the words.

Tonks paused in the exercise and watched Harry sitting across from her with a look of intense concentration on his face. She dove back into the sea of thoughts and found a rather frightening one. It was the forbidden forest and a shape was moving towards Harry. The memory changed to one of very tall chess pieces moving about a chessboard. The image shifted again and she saw a troll swinging a club at Hermione. With a feeling of movement and pushing, Tonks found herself back in Harry’s room. Harry was sitting on the bed with his eyes closed breathing hard.

“Very good, Harry. That was good work all things considered.”

“I couldn’t hold you to a single memory or stop you from going where ever you wanted. You purposely stayed away from the bad memories, didn’t you?”

“Wanted to start easy and then work my way up, Harry. If I started with your worst memories, you would never learn anything. Let me guess that git pulled up your worst experiences and kept at them didn’t he?”

“What else would he have done? I have seen Cedric die more times than I can count. Mr. Weasley being attacked and Voldemort coming back are favorites of his too.”

“I can’t say anything even remotely nice, or neutral on that matter, so I won’t say anything at all. It is amazing you learned anything with that kind of instruction. If you are rested up a bit, let’s try again. I will keep it light until you master it. Then I will get progressively darker and more forceful. This is not optional I am afraid.”

“Just get it over with, Tonks. I am better doing than talking.”

Once eye contact was made, Tonks said the word and she was viewing Harry’s thoughts again. It was second year this time and she was watching the trip to Hogwarts. A flying car was too much to take and she couldn’t help but laugh. *‘Oh the trouble he could get into over that misuse of muggle artifact. He and Sirius would have been the best of friends if they had the time.’* Tonks continued to watch more Quidditch matches. The skill Harry showed was amazing. She was convinced that he could play professional if he wanted once he was out of school.

The memories changed for a second back to the Mirror of Erised from first year, but it didn’t last long. She was watching Harry dueling Draco and loving every minute of it. She saw them in Myrtle’s Bathroom working on the polyjuice potion. *‘Oh, Harry, that is a difficult potion what did you need that for?’* She saw Lockhart prance around like the ponce that he was in his periwinkle robes.

The images changed once again to the Mirror scene and they held for a few minutes before Tonks willed the show to continue. She felt the resistance fight her efforts. *‘There you go, Harry. Keep it up. You are*

learning quickly.' She put more willpower into her efforts and the image changed slowly, but everything was fuzzy and out of focus. She kept trying to change the image, but her vision seemed frozen in a cloud. Releasing the spell, Tonks saw Harry look at her with a small smile on his face.

"Good job, Harry. You held me where I was. I couldn't change the scene, but I was still in there. Are you trying to force me out at all?"

"Nope. I was trying to redirect you, but since that didn't work I just held you where you were. I seem to only get one shot at changing the image otherwise things get held up."

"You are advancing quickly, Harry. Let's keep at this for awhile longer then we can go out for dinner somewhere. I'll even buy since you are a poor student and all."

They began again. Scenes from third year flashed around, but something was different. Every image seemed to be slightly distorted and viewed as if it was through the eyes of another. As Harry blew up his aunt for the third time in a row, the images became sharp and clear again. Tonks tried to change the memory to Quidditch, but she found herself watching his first trip to Diagon Alley with Hagrid. She put as much effort as she could into seeing Harry get his Hogwarts letter. The only image she saw was the Mirror scene again.

Releasing the spell, Tonks watched Harry take a few breaths. "Great job, Harry. I think you got it figured out now. Let's try one more time and I will be as forceful as I can this time too." Receiving his nod, she cast the spell and forced her way into his memories.

She watched his meeting of the advanced guard from last summer. She watched him punch Malfoy in the face from fifth year. She tried to bring up the memory of Arthur's attack by the snake, but she found herself looking straight up at the ceiling and feeling the beginnings of a headache. She groaned slightly and sat up. Harry was staring her down and he didn't have a smile on his face.

"I tried to change it up a little, Harry. I wanted to see how you would handle it and you dumped me out quickly. Had you ever managed that against the great git?"

“Yes, I have thrown him before. Did you really want to see that memory, Tonks?”

“No, Harry, I didn’t, but you seemed to handle the friendly memories quite well. I wanted to test you a little. I know you were never told this, but when learning how to do this you start off with pleasant memories and then progress to worse ones. You learned how to hold me in a memory and you also learned how to redirect me. I could tell you were redirecting me, but then again I knew what memories were there and what happened in them. The real trick is when I look for something I don’t know about yet, you can create a false memory telling me whatever you want.”

“I was trying to do that, but all I could do was give you a different memory than what you asked for.”

“You are really good at this, Harry. Don’t get discouraged because you haven’t mastered the hardest part of the whole subject. We can work on that part later. Right now, I am hungry and I need food how about you, Harry?”

“I could eat, Tonks. Do you have any place in mind?”

“Isn’t there something nearby? I mean the muggles eat out too.”

“Yeah, there are a few places the other side of the park and a few streets away. I think we can eat there. Hungry for anything specific?”

“As long as it tastes good and fills me up, I will be happy.”

They left Harry’s room and walked down the stairs. Harry kept an ear busy listening for Vernon or Dudley. They snuck out the front door without any problems. Harry led the way looking out for things Tonks could trip over. Much to his surprise and humor, she managed to trip over absolutely nothing a few times. They had a few laughs about her inability to walk properly as they walked north along Magnolia Road towards the restaurants.

When they arrived, Harry swung his arm in a wide arc displaying her choices. “What will it be, Tonks? We have Italian, Chinese, fast food, and a pub to choose from.”

“I think pizza sounds good tonight. Let’s go there.”

Harry held the door open for Tonks and they entered the decently-sized restaurant. A waiter seated them in a corner booth between a family on one side and a couple on the other. Harry opened his menu and thought of the times he had gotten to order his own food. Outside of Hogwarts and the magical world, he could think of a very limited number of times. Every one of those times, the Dursleys had told him what to get and it was always the cheapest thing on the menu.

Harry was going to get what he wanted this time and he wanted a thick crust pepperoni pizza with extra cheese. His mind made up, Harry looked at Tonks and saw her face scrunched up in thought. Her tongue was between her teeth and the tip was sticking out just a little bit. Harry watched her for a few seconds enjoying the view before he got a devilish idea.

“Careful, Tonks, I don’t want you to hurt yourself by thinking so hard. If you need help just let me know and I can lend a hand.” Harry grinned at her as she looked up and gave him a blank look.

“What was that, Harry? I was busy trying not to kick you as hard as I could under the table. Would you care to repeat your comment?”

“No thanks, Tonks. I think I will just sit here quietly as you make up your mind. I wouldn’t want you to trip when you tried to kick me.”

Harry moved quickly, as he finished his sentence, avoiding a smallish foot that shot out to kick his shin. Tonks looked disappointed when her foot failed to connect with Harry.

“Watch yourself, Mister. I don’t forget and I don’t forgive easily. On another subject, I am glad you are starting to relax around me. You should be comfortable enough to talk to me like you do your other friends. I am really just a big kid at heart so don’t let the tough exterior fool you.” Tonks watched the evil smile reappear on Harry’s face. “But, I think you can keep that comment to yourself, young man.”

They were interrupted by the waiter bringing them their water and asking if they were ready to order. Harry nodded and saw Tonks urge him to order first.

"I would like a small pepperoni pizza, thick crust with extra cheese and a soda." Tonks smiled and told the waiter to make that a medium.

They bantered back and forth as they waited for their food to arrive. Harry scanned the room looking for anyone out of place but found everything as it should be. Their food arrived and they started eating. Occasional chatter filtered over to them, but for the most part they kept a friendly conversation going in-between bites. The last piece remained and Harry offered it to Tonks.

"Come now, Harry, go ahead and eat it. I should watch my figure anyway," Tonks said striking a pose of sorts earning a snort from Harry. "Hey, I know I am not hideous, but laughing at me is downright rude. Now I am going cry." Tonks dramatically wiped imaginary tears from her eyes.

"Fine, we can split the piece. Does that sound OK to you?" At her nod, Harry cut the piece in half and served one to Tonks. "There, all better."

They finished the pizza and Harry felt full. Tonks sighed and held her stomach for a second. "I should have let you have that piece. I am really full now."

"You asked for it and you got it. I have no regrets," Harry said as he settled back in the seat.

Tonks paid the bill as she had offered. They were discretely discussing the techniques Harry used to learn wandless magic when a head popped over the seat behind Harry. Tonks waving and smiling caused Harry to look up into a familiar face. Emma smiled and giggled a little. Her face disappeared and they heard her telling her parents who was behind them.

"Fancy meeting you here, young man." The father said as he walked the short distance to their table. "I wanted to thank you for helping us out today. I appreciate it."

"Like I said before, it wasn't a big deal. How are you doing, Emma?" Harry asked.

"I am doing better," she said softly. "The doctor gave me some medicine and the pain went away. They also gave me a purple cast for my arm, see." She held up her arm and showed off her cast. She looked tired but was fighting it.

"Wow, a purple one," Harry said. "When I broke my arm they gave me a plain white one." Harry turned to the brother and told him he did a good job today earning a smile from both parents.

"Thank you, again, young man," the woman said. "We never had proper introductions. My name is Cathy Williams and this is my husband Charles and you met Jonathan earlier today. Emma hasn't stopped talking about you all day."

Ignoring the comment, Harry did his best to keep the conversation moving. "Hello, decided to eat out tonight?" Harry asked.

"With all the time at hospital, we figured this was the best option. I see you made the same choice. Is this your girlfriend?" She smiled but seemed to give Tonks a harder look.

"Well, Tonks is a friend..." Harry began weakly.

"Yes, I am his girlfriend," Tonks said without hesitation. "He is a wonderful person too as you saw today I hear."

"He was wonderful, Tonks is it?" Cathy seemed to choose her words carefully. "A little old for him aren't you? No offense intended, of course."

"Oh, none taken," Tonks dismissed her comment. "Harry is a lot older than he looks. At least he acts a lot older than he is in years. I, on the other hand, act a lot younger than I am so it all works out in the end if you understand my meaning." Tonks smiled her best impish smile.

"I think understand your point, Tonks," Cathy said. "He was such a gentleman earlier. I am glad he was there."

"You are among a growing list of people who have said that," Tonks said seriously.

“Tonks stop it,” Harry said under his breath but everyone heard him.

“Hush, Harry, you know it is the truth.”

“I know no such thing, but now is neither the time nor the place to mention such things. There are children present.”

“Oh, bugger you then,” Tonks huffed playfully and winked at Emma earning a small smile from the tired little girl.

Cathy watched how Harry tried to play off what he had done for them and how he tried to stop Tonks from talking about other good deeds he had done. She didn't know what this young man had done, but it seemed like helping a little girl was one of the easier of them.

“Thank you again, Harry,” Charles said. “We should get our very sleepy children home before we have to carry them the whole way.”

Tonks led the way to the door and grabbed a few mints on the way out. Harry helped the family out the door and they all started walking down Magnolia Road. At the park entrance, near the gate, Harry had a feeling of danger again. He paused and looked around quickly causing Tonks to take notice. She put her hand on her concealed wand and waited for justification to draw it in front of muggles.

Cathy and Charles noticed the change in Harry's demeanor and put their arms around their children. Harry scanned the park and found a group of people emerging from the shadows near the trees. In the lead was Piers.

“Oi, Potter, come to finish what we started?”

“Mummy, that is the boy who threatened Harry,” Emma said quietly. “He said he was going to kill him.”

Harry looked straight at Piers and willed himself to look threatening. As Charles and Cathy watched, they understood what Emma had meant by Harry being scary when he needed to be. Cathy looked to Tonks and saw her relaxing but her hand stayed hidden in her pocket.

Being the protective father that he was, Charles stepped forward and told Dudley's gang to bugger off.

"I can take care of this, Charles," Harry said confidently. "Why don't you get your family home and enjoy the rest of the evening."

Charles had never seen someone as young as Harry speak so clearly and forcefully facing down at least four rather dangerous looking thugs. Charles started moving his family further down the road and out of the way should things get violent.

"Piers, you should ask Dudley what happened to his father the other night before you decide to attack me."

"Fuck you Potter," Piers yelled. "I make my own moves."

"Watch your language, Piers. There are children here and I would hate to have to shut you up myself." Harry checked to see where the Williams were and found Charles nearby and the others moving down the road. "Charles, go with your family. I don't need any help with them. You will only get hurt and you don't need to be stuck at hospital again today."

"Yes, Charles, please leave this to Harry," Tonks said sternly. "He can take care of himself just fine. It is when others get involved trying to help that things go awry."

Charles watched Tonks slide forward next to Harry. Harry motioned her back and completely ignored the offended look she gave him.

"I am fine, Tonks. I don't want you in the middle of this."

Piers moved forward trying to intimidate Harry. He pulled his knife out and brandished it around. "Protecting your whore, Potter?"

As the words left Piers' mouth, his feet left the ground and his body arced backwards from the punch Harry landed on his jaw. Piers crashed onto the ground and rolled into a misshapen ball while the others looked on in horror. Dudley saw a replay of his father dropping to floor in the house after he had attacked Harry. He heard the threats

made to his father if he insulted Tonks. Dudley wanted to go home right now. He even thought about reading that freak book too.

“Watch who you insult, Piers. That goes for the rest of you too. I won’t tolerate any of you saying those things about a friend of mine.” Harry glared at the others standing around watching the failed attempt at Harry Hunting. “Get him out of here before the police show up why don’t you.”

Harry turned and ushered Tonks away from the boys. She could only laugh at how Harry handled everything. “Harry, you really can’t stop yourself from standing up for others, can you?”

“No, Tonks, I can’t. Now let’s get the Williams’s home before Dudley and company want revenge for Piers getting laid out. Come on, Charles, let’s get your family home.”

Charles hurried after his wife and children but kept giving Harry sideways glances when he got the chance. They made it to their door without any additional problems and thanked Harry for everything again. Charles shook his hand firmly and thanked him for helping his daughter and his family. Harry shrugged it off and bid him a good night.

As Harry and Tonks turned to walk back to Privet Drive, she grabbed Harry’s hand and held it tightly. Harry jumped a little but didn’t pull away.

“Relax, Harry, this is for their benefit. Remember we are boyfriend and girlfriend as far as they are concerned. We have to make a good show of it.”

Harry didn’t know what else to do but listen to Tonks. So he held her small and warm hand in his as they walked down the street and turned the proper corner towards Number Four. He started thinking about how nicely her hand fit in his, but his thoughts were interrupted by the crinkling of plastic.

Harry turned his head and saw Tonks unwrap a mint from its packaging using her teeth and her free hand. He almost laughed, but she finally managed to expose the mint and immediately popped it in

her mouth. She handed another mint to Harry. He followed the same process and ate it. They walked to Privet Drive in silence. Tonks thought about what Harry had done to Dudley's friend. Harry thought about Tonks hand still resting in his own. She broke the silence first when they were a few doors away from Number Four.

"Harry, why did you get between those thugs and the rest of us?"

"They were after me, no one else. I wasn't going to let someone else be put in danger because they wanted me. I learned that lesson the hard way." Harry went silent until they made it to the front door of the Dursley's house.

Harry sighed and Tonks watched him become depressed. "Harry, things are better here. Haven't you noticed that?"

"No, things are just different. I am not sure what you did to my Aunt, but I know it won't last. Vernon will change her back to the way she always was before. It is only a matter of time, really." Harry got quiet for a second, "You didn't put a spell on her did you?"

"Of course not, Harry. I just told her the truth and I might have scared her to make her listen, but she changed on her own. She might really care about you now. At the very least, she knows what your life is like outside of here and that should be enough."

"Thanks for everything but I am not going to start jumping up and down until I know it is for real. I have a feeling that will never happen so don't get your hopes up, OK?"

"No problem, Harry. I think I understand some of what you went through here." Tonks watched as Harry tried to summon up the strength to open the door and face his uncle who was home by now. She saw his face fall again and a sense of resignation settle over him. Not knowing what else to do, Tonks pulled on Harry's hand and he turned to look at her. She leaned towards him, on her toes, and placed a kiss on his lips. It was a firm and reassuring kiss.

Harry froze for a second before he kissed her back. It was nothing like the messy kisses he had with Cho earlier in the year. He could only think it was warm and felt good. Harry's free hand instinctively

moved behind Tonks and held her in place. He wasn't sure if she was going to run away, push him away, or slap him. He was ready for all of it, but he wanted to get at least one good kiss out of the deal.

Tonks broke the kiss after awhile and expelled a satisfied breath. She smirked at Harry when she opened her eyes and he flinched. Deciding he was prepared to get hit, Tonks thought of something to say to lighten the mood.

"Minty," Tonks said as she moved forward and pressed her body against Harry's. "Maybe we should try that again sometime. You are a rather good kisser, Harry. I wonder what else you are good at." Tonks wiggled her eyebrows at him and lengthened her eyelashes as she batted them as well.

Harry managed to hold his ground, but he couldn't think of anything to say. The nervous but charged situation was shattered when the front door opened and a red-faced looking Uncle Vernon stood in the threshold staring down the couple.

"You idiot boy!" Vernon snapped. "Get inside now so the neighbors won't see you." Vernon grabbed Harry by the arm and threw him into the hallway completely forgetting about Tonks. "You will not hang about the front stoop and do 'That'. I should beat you for doing that in front of my house."

Tonks was afraid of any number of things happening because of this confrontation. Harry could unleash some of his magic, controlled or not, or she might have to end the fight herself. Vernon wasn't advancing on Harry, but he was ready to attack all the same.

Harry stood up quickly and faced off against Vernon. "I will do as I please, Vernon. You will not grab me like that again." Harry's voice was level but threatening. "I told you before to leave me be. I warned you that you will not treat me the same as before. I promised you that things would change one way or another. I am willing to change things right now. Are you ready for me to make those changes?"

Tonks felt a cold chill sweep across her and Harry's eyes seemed to come alive. A noise at the top of the stairs alerted Tonks to Dudley's presence. A whimpering from the living room meant that Petunia was

home as well. This could be the turning point for Harry and the Dursleys.

"Are you threatening me, Boy? You think you can take me on?"

"Yes, Vernon, I am threatening you." Harry said calmly. "Yes, I know I can take you on. I have handled worse than you before."

"Oh yes, you must have taken care of bigger people than me at that freak school. Go on then, try it, Boy. If you are so tough, take me on. We can settle this matter once and for all. If you get hurt or worse, so be it." Vernon had never challenged Harry outright since he had gone to that school. He thought Harry would back down this time as he had ever other time while growing up. The confidence Vernon had started dropping as Harry held his ground and stared straight into Vernon's eyes.

"Your move, Uncle," Harry spit out as if it was a nasty Bertie Bott's Bean. Harry didn't know if he could take his uncle on in a real fight, but he had never shied away from a fight yet. He saw Tonks in the background holding her wand at Vernon's back.

"Vernon!" snapped Petunia at her husband for the first time in her life. "This will not happen here. It will not happen anywhere. I will not have you two fighting. It will not happen." Petunia stood tall and imposing in the doorway to the living room. "Vernon, I told you not to continue this. To begin with, she has her wand pointed at you. Do you really think she won't hurt you? And you know Harry will do whatever he has to do to survive."

The hallway was silent as everyone thought over what had been said by Petunia. "Harry, you and Tonks should go upstairs for the night. I think you understand that is the best thing to do, right?"

"Yes, Aunt Petunia. That was where we were going to go anyway. Tonks."

Tonks poked Vernon in the back firmly with her wand and he jumped out of the way keeping his eyes fixed on the shaft of wood. She started up the stairs and waited for Harry to join her. Harry stopped right behind her before speaking to Vernon.

"The next time you attack me, Uncle, I will hurt you badly. No one will stop me from doing it. That is the only warning I am going to give you. Please, remember it." Harry stared down Vernon and waited for Tonks to continue up the stairs. He nudged her in the back lightly to urge her forward.

They passed Dudley who was opened mouth and gaping at the show he witnessed. He moved back as far as he could, but it didn't provide much room at all. Once they were safely in Harry's bedroom, Tonks hugged Harry tightly.

"I was worried there, Harry. I was afraid he would hurt you or you would kill him. Now don't get me wrong, you killing him would be an easy thing to justify, but it would be a very complicated process." Trying to lighten the mood again, Tonks said, "You know how much paperwork I would have to do? It would take me the rest of the summer to finish it."

Harry cracked a smile, "Nah, I would get Hermione to help you out with it. She would have it done in a week at most. Besides, Dumbledore can't afford to lose you. Being an auror would make it easier paperwork wise I am sure."

"It would, but I would have had to kill him, not you. Anyway, I think we have had enough fun for the night. You have been in three fights, saved a girl twice and her family once. I think you earned your rest."

"Stop it, Tonks. I did what I needed to do. That is all I ever do." Harry left the room heading for the loo.

Tonks looked around the room and wondered if Harry would ever realize just who he was to others. She waited for Harry to get back before going to the loo herself.

Harry settled into his bed. He was starting to like having someone to sleep with. He seemed to sleep better at the very least. He hadn't had a nightmare yet and it was a welcomed change. He waited and listened for sounds outside and in. He heard water running through the pipes. He heard Dudley in his room doing something. He heard an owl outside in the tree. He figured it was Hedwig since she was the only owl he knew of in the area. A soft murmur was coming from

downstairs. Harry hoped his Aunt wasn't getting yelled at for saving Vernon.

Tonks opened the door and entered the room. She looked the same as she did before she left, but something was different. She said something to her wand and it vibrated slightly before she slid it under her pillow. She looked at Harry who was lying in the bed under the sheet. She smiled at him then pulled her shirt off.

He froze, yet again, and watched as she was thankfully wearing a t-shirt underneath. She winked and undid her pants. Harry was expecting the same kind of thing as the top. He planned to see shorts or something on under her pants. His mouth dropped a bit as he stared at the same pair of blue knickers she had been wearing earlier. When she bent over to pull the pants off, Harry saw the blue fabric stretch across her rear and the t-shirt hike up exposing her whole backside.

Harry's mouth was drying by the second and he didn't know what to do about it. He forced his eyes to meet a pair of dark brown ones. Tonks was her normal self that was the difference he noticed. Harry managed to sneak a peek at her chest and her breasts were pushing on the front of her shirt pulling it rather taut.

"Um, uh, Tonks? What are you do..."

"Hush, Harry," Tonks said in a breathy voice. She stepped to the bed and pulled the sheets back and slipped under them smoothly. She moved towards Harry very slowly holding his eyes in place. She slid her left hand up his right side to the back of his neck. Her right hand went under his head and wrapped around his back pulling him towards her. She smiled in a way Harry could only describe as the way a nymph would smile.

Harry held his breath as Tonks pulled him to her. He was fighting so many thoughts that his Occlumency training was working overtime. Tonks pulled his head to hers and she kissed him. It was similar to the one they shared on the front steps, but she was going deeper with it. She was pressing harder and her tongue was pushing on his lips.

Harry opened his mouth a little and her tongue flicked into his mouth brushing his. He tentatively licked her tongue and she reacted by pushing hers further into his mouth. He thought of the kissing as a fight with tongues. She always beat him by having her tongue in his mouth more than his in hers. The kissing settled down a bit and she seemed to put more heat into the kisses.

Harry's mind was spinning. He didn't know what he was doing, but he loved every minute of it. Tonks had moved her left leg on top of him and she was resting most of her body on top of Harry's. The kisses were getting lighter and Harry was trying to breathe.

"Breathe through your nose Harry," Tonks said as she took a few deep breaths. Tonks moved her hips a little bit rubbing Harry's lower half and causing him to react quickly. She pulled her head back and stared into his wide eyes. She nibbled on her red, puffy lips a few times then moved her hips again receiving the same reaction as before. She took a shuttering breath and began kissing him again.

Harry was completely lost in teenaged hormones and thoughts. He wasn't exactly sure what he was supposed to do, but he wanted to do it anyway. He wrapped his arms around Tonks firm body and pulled her fully on top of himself. She wiggled a few times settling into a very comfortable position straddling Harry. He hugged her tightly and kissed her as deeply as he knew how.

A few minutes later, Harry opened his eyes when Tonks lifted her head away. He looked into her dark eyes shrouded in varying amounts of light from the window. He wanted to know what she was thinking. He really wanted to know what to do next or whether she wanted him to do anything at all. He felt a slight moving sensation and he could see himself. He could also feel an overwhelming burning sensation in 'his' crotch. It felt like a hunger or something similar.

Not sure what had happened, Harry watched himself move forward and kiss 'himself'. The feeling flooded his senses. He knew he wasn't kissing himself, but that was what he was seeing until his eyes closed. The feeling increased, but the images became of himself and Tonks.

He heard her voice in the distance saying she wanted more. He also heard a serious voice saying she was too old for him.

Harry opened his eyes and willed whatever it was to stop. He felt a moving sensation again and found Tonks looking down at him with her eyes half closed and a weak smile on her face. She was breathing heavily and she was slowly moving her hips around. Harry couldn't stop himself from moving slightly as well matching her rhythm. He pulled Tonks down to kiss him and she complied eagerly.

The snogging continued for a few minutes before Tonks gave a gentle push on Harry's shoulders and lifted her head up. She stared at Harry and breathed deeply. She blinked a few times before saying anything.

"I have no idea how you did that, Harry, but I hope you can do that again." She waited a few more minutes, closing her eyes, before speaking again under greater control of herself. "I planned to kiss you a little and then tease you a lot. As you can tell, that didn't work at all. You win the touching war, Harry. I concede that fight because I am completely outclassed. How many people have you kissed before?"

"One girl."

"Merlin, you are good at it already," Tonks said under her breath. "We might be able to work on it some time, Harry. Now, as much as you want to keep going we have to stop. I hope you aren't sore in the morning but if you are I apologize."

Tonks leaned down and placed a warm soft kiss on Harry's lips. She moved a little sliding back onto the mattress and rolled over. She snuggled her back and rear into Harry's front and pelvis before settling onto her pillow. She sighed lightly when Harry adjusted his body causing a certain body part to press into her butt. Doing his best to stay calm, Harry hesitantly placed his arm around hers and under her breasts. He gave a tight squeeze and let himself relax.

Both sighing to themselves they began drifting off to sleep. Harry had his eyes closed for about a minute when a dim flash of silver light shone through his eyelids. He felt Tonks jerk slightly so he opened his eyes and asked what had happened.

"It is OK, Harry. I just got a message from some people who I had been waiting on. Do you think you are up for an outing tomorrow? I have a few people I would like you to meet and we need to get you some new clothes anyway. None of this must be found out by the Headmaster."

"I trust you, Tonks. If you think I should meet someone, then I will meet them. I am more than willing to keep anything from the Headmaster. He has kept enough from me over the years."

"He does his best, Harry. Please don't be too hard on him. I know his best has been a complete failure concerning you, and I agree with you being mad at him, but don't make an enemy of someone who could help you. Remember, manipulation can work both ways and you have leverage on your side. We need to get to sleep if we want to make it there by seven."

Tonks reached under her pillow and mumbled a few words before wiggling into Harry again. Harry couldn't see the smirk, but he felt the giggles.

"You are teasing me with the wiggles aren't you?"

"Yes, but you love every one of them more than you are willing to admit. I know how the male mind works."

"Really," Harry said trying to make his voice sound as deep as he could. He moved his mouth so it was right behind her ear. "I think you enjoy them as much as I do, Nymphadora." He felt her shiver and press against his body.

"Please don't call me Nymphadora, Harry. Think of something else." Her voice was quiet and almost had a pleading edge to it.

"I like your name, but if you insist how about Nymph?"

"That makes me sound like a sex fiend or a sex toy. It is hard enough to get respect from men when they stare at my tits the whole time, but with a name that screams plaything it is impossible."

"Do you think I see you that way?"

“No, I don’t, Harry. I just...I have...My whole life has been a fight to earn respect from others especially those I work with. I make them call me Tonks so I have less working against me. I just don’t know what else to do. When you say it, you say it with respect. I like to hear you say it, but I don’t think I can let you say it. If I do, who’s next?”

“Let me know what you want me to call you. Until then, I will use Tonks.”

“Thank you, Harry. It means a lot to me. Now, go to sleep. It will be a long day tomorrow.”

Harry fell asleep thinking about Tonks and her sexy butt pressed against him not to mention the next day.

Tonks fell asleep thinking about the next day and how it could turn out. She also thought about how Harry had overwhelmed her both emotionally and mentally. He had entered her mind and felt her urges for him when they were kissing. She felt his urges as well and they nearly drove her over the edge. Her last thought before she fell asleep was of how safe she felt in his arms.

3. The Department Of Mysteries

Harry was kissing Tonks and she was moving around on top of him touching everywhere she could reach with her small, warm hands. Her fingers slid all over his chest and into his hair. Her hands tugged at his raven colored hair and pushed his lips against hers more forcefully.

She was rubbing her tight, barely clothed body up and down his. Harry loved every second Tonks rubbed him. He felt her breasts move around on his bare chest and her nipples strain against the thin fabric of the shirt she wore. The shirt had bunched up right beneath her breasts and it was threatening to move higher yet.

Harry's hands were running across her rear and up her sides. He wanted to tear her underwear off so he could feel more of her. He was getting very excited and felt himself nearing a pleasurable point. He heard Tonks squeal a little and she pressed herself down as hard as she could. Harry felt himself getting even closer.

Harry awoke at that moment breathing harder than normal. He had his arms wrapped around the still sleeping form of Tonks who was lying right in front of him. He gave his left hand a squeeze and felt a soft but firm breast in his grasp. Harry found his other arm wrapped around the front of Tonks holding her protectively against his chest.

He knew his dream had excited certain areas, but he didn't know what damage had been. He breathed deeply trying to calm down. He smelled Tonks hair in the process and found it had a faint flower smell that he couldn't place. He relaxed and tried to sense if he would have to explain something when she woke up.

Much to his surprise and thanks, nothing seemed wrong with any part of his body that he could feel. The only thing he could feel quite well was Tonks comfortable rear and back pressed into him. He practiced his Occlumency to control any additional reactions he could have thinking about such things.

He avoided thinking about their kissing the night before because that would only lead to more embarrassing moments. If she brought it up,

Harry was fine with that. Otherwise, he was going to keep his mouth shut on the subject.

As he laid there lost in his thoughts, Tonks slept on unaware of Harry's near disaster concerning her. She was still making that soft rattling sound and Harry couldn't help but smile. It was a calming and endearing sound and he loved it. Harry thought she felt better against him this morning than last morning. Something just felt 'right' about it.

Having no idea what time it was, Harry decided to enjoy his time holding Tonks and think about what magic he should practice today. He had no idea what she had planned, but it would probably end up being a quick visit with some friends and he would have the rest of the day to practice wandless magic.

He ran through the spells he already knew and tested his ability to bring up the proper feeling to cause his magic to happen. One thing he learned the day before was that the more he played with his magic, in reference to using it wandlessly, the better he was with it. He could pull it up faster and use it quicker than when he started.

He also thought of what spells he wanted to practice today. He knew he should work on some shield spells and the basic offensive spells too. When she woke up, he would ask Tonks if offensive spells could be detected if cast wandlessly. He also remembered the spell book he was reading that had listed some really nasty spells. He wanted to know some of them should he find Bellatrix or Wormtail in the near future.

'Hopefully Tonks was right and she can work out a way for me to practice magic with my wand. I don't want to learn those kinds of spells wandlessly starting out. I could end up casting them on myself and where would I be then? St. Mungo's that is where I would be if I lived long enough to get there and how would I explain everything.'

His thoughts continued as he recited spell after spell to himself. He worked on bringing the 'feeling' up and pushing it down again. He was so preoccupied that he never noticed Tonks wake up.

Tonks felt a surge of magic appear and then disappear quickly. She had never felt something like that before. The only way she could

describe it was that it was like swimming in magic. She opened her eyes and felt the sensation wash over her again and again. She saw a slight shimmer in the air that seemed to be coming from behind her. The only thing that could cause this type of magical display was Harry.

She watched the air shimmer for a few minutes. She didn't know if Harry knew what was going on or not, but it was impressive to watch all the same. The shimmering stopped and she heard Harry mumbling words under his breath. She made out a few of them and they seemed to be spells. The few she heard clearly were rather nasty curses that she hadn't expected Harry to know.

Rolling over slowly Tonks faced Harry causing him to pause in his efforts. "Whatcha doing, Harry?"

"I was practicing my wandless magic, and then I was reciting spells that I had read about the other day. I do have a question for you. Can the Ministry detect offensive spells if they are cast wandlessly? I wanted to practice some offensive spells today after we get back from our visit."

"I honestly think you are going to be surprised by our visit, Harry. I also doubt you are going to want to practice magic when we return."

"What do you have planned, Tonks?"

"Ask me no questions, and I will tell you no lies, Harry. Just go with the flow today, OK? You may have a few challenges to overcome, but do what you always do."

"And just what is that, Tonks?"

"Win, Harry. You always win or at least get out of what ever you got into. Just keep doing that and everything will be fine." Seeing his unhappy face she added, "If you do well, I might be convinced to kiss you again."

Harry thought over the situation and the offer from Tonks. He liked the kissing, his dream this morning was evidence enough of that, but was she only kidding him. He didn't think he could take the embarrassment if she was just having on eon him.

"I accept your offer, Tonks. What are the terms?"

Tonks stared at him realizing she would have to hold up her end of the deal if he succeeded. "You make it through the day without getting seriously hurt and I will kiss you before bed tonight. Deal?" Tonks held out her hand which was right in front of Harry's chest.

"Is there a chance for me to get hurt on this visit? Where the hell are we going?"

"I assure you that nothing really dangerous will happen. You have worse days here judging by yesterday. I promise you won't be spending any time with Madam Pomfrey."

Taking her hand and shaking it firmly, Harry said, "That isn't much of a promise, but I accept your offer, Tonks."

"Great, now you should get ready. We need to leave in..." Tonks pulled her wand from under the pillow and said, "Time." In front of her appeared a clock showing it was six thirty in the morning.

"We have half an hour to get there, Harry. You had best get moving so I can as well. I will nick us some food while you are showering."

Harry grabbed his clothes and left his room. He knew that Vernon would be up in twenty minutes and he would be mad if Harry was anywhere near him. *'Not that I really care, but I shouldn't be starting fights with the man. In and out of the loo so Tonks can do the same.'*

Harry returned to his room to find Tonks finishing her toast and jam. She motioned to the remaining pieces of toast and walked past him to the loo. Harry sat down and ate his food. He swallowed the last of his food and opened the loose floorboard to retrieve what little money he had left after a year at school. While replacing the board to conceal the hiding place, Harry heard a banging on a door from the hallway. Hearing his uncle yell, Harry gathered his cloak and wand before leaving the room.

"Open this bloody door, you worthless bastard. You think you can make me late do you?"

"I am not in there, Vernon. I would stop yelling, too, since the neighbors can probably hear every word you say."

"Watch yourself, Potter. If you aren't in here, then who is?"

"Tonks is in there and I suggest you leave her be."

"Your floozy can't use our water. That costs money!"

Harry drew his wand and stepped towards Vernon. "You do not listen, do you? I warned you to treat her with respect." Harry was beyond mad. He wanted to make his uncle understand that everyone should be treated with respect. "You will apologize to her when she comes out or I will make you apologize. Do you understand me?"

"Think you got what it takes to make me do something, Boy? She ain't here to back you up."

"I know I can make you do things, Uncle. The question is if I want to do it or not. Personally, I would be happy to never see you again, but I don't think that is in the plans right now. Hopefully it will be soon though. Nevertheless, you will apologize to Tonks for your comment."

"And if I don't, Boy." Vernon was making his stand and if he won this time Harry knew he would never get another chance.

Putting on the most serious expression he could and calling his magic up to enhance his look, Harry spoke directly to Vernon.

"I will shatter every bone in your arms and legs. I will leave you to heal the muggle way too. There is a curse to do that, you know?"

Harry watched as Vernon shrunk a little. He also seemed to lose his confidence and started looking for a way to escape. Harry knew that he had to keep his edge while he had it.

"I see you understand what I said. Now, Tonks should be out of there in a minute and I expect you to apologize as soon as you see her. I won't hesitate to curse you if I need to."

Vernon stilled as sounds came from the bathroom. The sound of movement and humming could be heard. He looked at Harry as saw his nephew was serious. The causal way Harry had told him what was going to happen if he didn't apologize scared him more than the actual threat. His nephew had gotten frightening over the last year. The boy wasn't easy to intimidate anymore. He was downright menacing now and Vernon didn't like it at all.

The door opening and a soggy headed Tonks stopping short of running into Vernon brought the scene to a head. She looked at Vernon and could see the telltale signs of rage. She saw Harry standing in the hallway with his wand drawn looking every bit the man he would become.

"Did I miss something, Harry?" Tonks didn't know what she had missed. She knew someone was pounding on the door and yelling, but her father did that when she was growing up so she learned to ignore all distractions when she was showering.

"Do you have something to say, Uncle?" Harry prompted never removing his piercing gaze from his uncle.

"I," Vernon paused reassessing the situation and the possible risks. Harry inclined his head a little, but never wavered in his posture. "I would like to apologize for my words while you were in the bathroom." Vernon forced himself to say. Harry raised head a little more indicating that he wasn't finished. "And for the other times as well. There is that good enough?" The last was directed at Harry.

"Yes, it is. You will not get another chance to apologize, uncle Vernon." Harry said.

Vernon waited for Tonks to leave the bathroom and walk over to Harry before he entered and closed the door sharply locking it as well. Tonks turned to see Harry visibly restraining himself from using his magic.

"Thank you, Harry. You are my hero." Tonks leaned up and planted a kiss on Harry's mouth before returning to his room to gather the remaining things she had left there.

Harry was trying to calm down after almost cursing his uncle. He was feeling a little in over his head concerning things at Privet Drive. He had never stood up to his uncle like he had been doing in the last few days. He had never felt like he had to stand up for himself. Everything came down to his absolute need to take control of his life.

At Privet Drive, the Dursleys controlled his life. They had abused him for ten years before he got a break. Then they continued the abuse during the summers. At school, Harry's life was controlled by Dumbledore, McGonagall, and any other teacher who decided to get involved. Not a single person had ever asked Harry what he wanted done in reference to his life.

That lack of choice or say led to Harry living a miserable life with his 'relatives' and his life being in constant danger at school. The more he thought about everything, the less sense things made. *'How could everything that has happened to me at Hogwarts happen in the first place? If the place was that dangerous, no sane parent would let their child go there. It just defies logic. Ha, then again so does magic I guess. Maybe all magical people are a little touched in the head to begin with. Have I ever met one that wasn't a little bit cracked? Hermione comes to mind.'*

Harry kept evaluating what he had done in the past and how he was handling things currently. The only conclusion he could come up with was that something had to change or he would be dead in months. Worse yet, someone else could end up dead because of him and he couldn't take that again. Too many had died for him and he was making the conscious decision to stop that trend.

The kiss from Tonks broke his pattern of self-assessment. He watched her walk into his room and could see her gathering her outer cloak as well as her invisibility cloak. She scanned the room once to check for any left items before grabbing her wand off the bed.

She walked up to Harry, slightly tripping on a floor board that was slightly raised, and smiled at Harry as she righted herself as if it was a common occurrence. He figured it was common for her and smiled back before asking her what the plans were.

“Well, we leave this cheery place as fast as we can and get outside where I can make a portkey to get us to the Ministry. Now, I will put a Glamour Charm on you in case you are found out when we get there. Mind, it will only last a short time though. We have to enter the building properly or all sorts of hell will come down on us. If things go well, we can come in the back door from that point on.”

“We are going to the Ministry? Why would I want to go there again? They are likely to arrest me the second they see me. I did destroy a few rooms in the Department of Mysteries you know. There has to be a law against that. If not, I am sure Fudge made one so he could get me thrown into Azkaban.”

“Calm down, Harry. I can tell you for certain that they will not arrest you when we enter the Ministry. I can also tell you that the Unspeakables are not looking to arrest you either for what happened in their department. A few may want to have a chat with you, but they are good people. Don’t worry.”

“Right. Last time someone told me not to worry...You don’t want to know, Tonks.”

“Come on, Mr. Happy. Let’s get your positive personality to our meeting. I only ask that you trust me on this one, Harry. Please, trust that I am doing what I think is best for you.” Seeing Harry about to object, she spoke before he could. “I am doing the best I can because you asked me for my help whether you remember it or not. This isn’t just good intentions either. You will have to work at what I am offering you. The amount of help you get out of this depends on you as much as it does anyone else. If you fail, it is on your own head. Doesn’t that sound like a better arrangement than your past ones?”

“Yes, it does. I would thank you now, but I am not sure what is going to happen so I will hold off for a bit if that is okay with you.”

“Fine, Harry. I know that you can’t afford to give away your trust, but I hope that I can earn it.”

Tonks led the way to the street and pulled a small wooden box from her cloak. She tapped it once and it glowed blue for a second before returning to normal. She smiled at Harry and motioned him to put on

his cloak. She followed his movements putting on her own cloak. They held the fronts open so they could still see each other. Harry watched as she held the box out for him to touch. When he had a tight grip on the box, she tapped it with her wand, and Harry felt the pull of a portkey on his navel.

They landed in the empty atrium of the Ministry. Harry started to fall over, but Tonks grabbed him by the arm firmly and stopped his movement. She quietly told him to follow her and say nothing. Harry watched her pull off her cloak and stride towards the security desk. The desk was manned by one lone guard who looked as scared as he was young.

Tonks flashed her auror badge and a saucy smile before continuing to walk to the lift. She hesitated as a small light glowed on the guard desk alerting him to Harry passing through the checkpoint. Fortunately, the guard had followed Tonks movements and wasn't paying any attention to the light which was slowly dimming.

Tonks pressed the call button and waited for the lift. The lift arrived a moment later and she entered it pressing the button for level nine. She felt Harry nudge her side so she knew he was with her. She waved at the guard as the gates closed and the lift descended to level nine.

When the bell dinged, Tonks walked off the lift and a few paces down the hallway. She paused and said that Harry could remove the cloak. When the cloak was removed from Harry, she could see he was jumping to conclusions. His aura was visible again and he was looking rather dangerous.

"Now, Harry, before you burn me to a crisp, hear me out." Harry said nothing, but his wand hadn't moved from its down position either. "Here is the real story about me, Harry. I am an auror. While I was in the program, another group came to see me. They knew about my metamorph abilities and they were interested in recruiting me. Being who I am, I kind of liked the idea of having a secret life. Matches my many faces wouldn't you agree?"

"I can look like other people to a certain degree and that is dead useful for an Unspeakable. I have been with them since my third year

in auror academy. You will learn about how we are structured and where I fit into the organization. I am telling you so you don't think this was a setup to get you to resolve your issues about Sirius. I miss him too. You will get over his death in time and at your own pace. I asked them if they could help you because you asked me for help. This is the meet-and-greet as they like to call it.

"I can tell you that you will be evaluated and tested on various things; magic, reflexes, instincts, and overall performance. It won't be easy, but this is a great opportunity to learn what you need to survive and win. You told me you wanted to win and that you had to. This is your chance to do it. I told you that this will be in your hands. If you fail, it isn't because Albus made a bad decision on your behalf.

"If you hate me, tell me now and I can escort you out of the Ministry and back to Privet Drive. If you want to show them what you got, let's go show them. Personally, I know that you can do this. I wouldn't have brought this up to them if I doubted you."

She waited for Harry to say something. He had been quiet the whole time she had talked. He hadn't even moved. Before, she was afraid he was going to fly out of control when she first saw him standing there. Now, she was worried that he would simply turn around and leave. The minutes passed and she noticed he was getting ready to say something.

"You did this because I asked you to help me?" Tonks nodded. "You set this up to help me." She nodded again. "You are offering me the chance to help myself stay alive and maybe win this war?" She nodded again with more emphasis. "Did my fame help me get this chance or is this going to be on my abilities alone?"

"I assure you, Harry, nothing down here is offered because of who or what you are. Every one of us earns the right to stay here. You are here because I mentioned you would be a good candidate. You will remain here because you are a good candidate. If you don't make it, I don't care. You are still a hero to me. Not to mention that you are a wonderful kisser but that won't help you with the tests." Tonks was playing around trying to soften his mood

"Cheeky minx. What kind of tests?"

"I am not sure. They differ for each person based on their skills and where we need people. You will learn about the teams later today I think. Now, shall we go in or are you going to leave?"

Harry contemplated the whole situation. He had a perfect chance to learn things that Hogwarts would never teach him and he doubted that he would stand a chance against Voldemort with Hogwarts-taught spells. With little choice but to accept the offer, Harry took a step towards Tonks.

"Excellent, Harry. I am so happy. Now if you will follow me, I will take you to our meeting." She walked down the hall to about the midpoint and turned to her left. She tapped the wall about shoulder high twice and proceeded to make a box with her tapping while saying something in Latin. There was a click and the wall began to recede revealing a doorway.

Harry watched as a full doorway appeared in the wall and Tonks entered the portal. He followed her closely and found himself in a dimly lit room with a desk and a chair in the middle of it. Behind the desk were two doors. Both doors had brass name plates one reading "Research" the other door reading "Other". Harry laughed at the "Other" door but it reinforced his recent belief that all magical people were crazy.

Tonks walked to the "Other" door and knocked twice. She waited for the door to open, which it did, and she called Harry to follow her in. Harry walked through the door and saw another hallway leading away in a straight line. There were numbered doors on either side of the hallway. A dark red runner ran the length of the hallway and Tonks found herself tripping every half dozen steps or so.

She stopped in front of door number nine and said that this was the meeting room. She knocked once and entered immediately. Harry followed her once again and saw a dark wood table in the center of the room. It had old-looking chairs around it and a spot light, from above, lit the surface. A pitcher of water and a few glasses sat in the middle of the illuminated table.

Harry scanned the room and counted the chairs. There were thirteen of them and he could tell at least two people were already seated at

the table. He walked up next to Tonks and stood ready for whatever was going to happen. Tonks took a seat directly across from one of the people and motioned Harry to take the seat next to her. He sat down but he held his wand under the table ready to defend himself.

The man across from Tonks leaned forward so the light revealed his face. It was a soft, caring, slightly aged face of an average looking man. His hair was light brown with a dusting of grey and he had an average build. He folded his hands together and wore a small smile. "Good morning, Chamel. I see that you have brought your hopeful."

"Good morning, Marcus," Tonks replied. "I hope you like what you see."

"I will be the judge of that, Chamel," said the still hidden person who was obviously a man by his voice. "This better not be a waste of my time. I have other potentials just waiting to fill the open slots."

"Calm yourself, Horace," Marcus said. "I am sure that Chamel wouldn't waste our time. Am I right?"

"Yes, Marcus, I think you will be happy with what Harry can do." Tonks smiled simply and waited for the men to say something else.

Harry watched everything and wondered why Tonks was called Chamel. He looked at the man he could see and tried to figure out if he was a threat, and the hidden man was most definitely a threat right now. Marcus spoke to directly to Harry for the first time.

"Harry James Potter currently of Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey. Formerly of an unknown address in Godric's Hollow and formerly of Potter Estate near Godric's Hollow. Son of James and Lily Potter. Born July 31, 1980. Sorted into Gryffindor House. Youngest seeker in a century. Saviour of the Philosopher's Stone. Parseltongue. Defeater of a Basilisk. Winner of the Special Award for Services to the School. Familiar in the use of a Time Turner. Highly skilled in the use of the Patronus Charm. Champion of the Tri-Wizard Tournament only there were four of you. You can defeat the Imperius Curse and maybe the Killing Curse. Leader of Dumbledore's Army. You have dueled with Voldemort and lived. You have dueled with Bellatrix Lestrange and lived. You have broken into

this very department leading others. You have shown some aptitude for advanced magic. Anything I am missing?"

Harry sat silently as the information was processed. *'What the hell is Potter Estate?'* They knew an awful lot about him and Harry wasn't sure that was a good thing. He felt a probing feeling in his head and allowed the person in only to thrust them out as forcefully as he could. The hidden man rocked back in his chair.

"Better add slightly skilled in Occlumency to that list. You have any other tricks, Potter?" Asked Horace.

"Maybe a few things," Harry answered. He stared down the hidden man seeing him as the greatest threat to his safety and well-being.

"Excellent place to start from, Chamel," said Marcus. "I accept him as a candidate. What do you say Horace?"

"I will answer that after I have had a chance to test him. Have to make sure he isn't all name and paper before I go giving him my stamp of approval."

"That is the most positive I have ever heard you say about a possible member, Horace. I do think you are getting soft in your old age." Marcus seemed to be the one tasked with keeping things running smoothly.

"Stuff it, you. I am not old nor am I soft," Horace rebutted.

"Yes, well, all things being the same, I am Marcus." Harry nodded at the greeting not saying anything since they knew him pretty well already. "I am in charge of the Department of Mysteries. I oversee everything that involves this department. I am the go between for the two branches. This is Horace, my colleague. He is a bit rough around the edges, but he means well. He handles the training and mission assignments for the Operations side on things. I will let you explain the rest to Harry, Chamel."

"Thanks, Marcus," Tonks said. "Now, Harry, Marcus runs the entire department. There are two parts, the Operations side, which I belong to, and the Research side which Croaker runs. The research side is

the public face of the Department. People know they exist and that is fine. Every member of the Research side researches magic. I know it sounds lame but that is what they do. People know who they are, sometimes, and that is fine in most cases. The Research side gets involved with all sorts of things both inside the Ministry itself and with other Ministries around the world. Marcus manages some of that, but leaves Croaker to most of it.

“Marcus spends most of his time managing the Operations side of the Department. We are the really secret side of the Department. We handle the missions that need done and can’t be discovered by others. No member of the Operations side is known by name to anyone who isn’t an Unspeakable on the Operations side, but a few people internal to the Ministry know of us in general terms. The Minister being one of those people.” Tonks ignored Harry’s scoff. “The Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot is another such person. Yes, Albus knows we exist, but not who we are.

“The Operations side handles the dangerous research missions that the Research side shouldn’t handle. We also settle matters that are of a sensitive nature. If you know about the muggle MI-5, we are their magical equivalent only a touch more secret. We handle beasts like Basilisks, wild Sphinx, or other really dangerous animals. The Research side isn’t trained or equipped to handle things like that so we keep them alive by taking the missions.

“Within our side, we have Marcus our head, Horace our trainer and commander of sorts. There are six teams of three that operate on our side. I am a member of team three. We only have two people since we lost a member this year. He got a little big in the head and he lost it on a mission. The other teams are fully staffed. I know the research team is down a member since Bode was killed.”

“I should have recognized the Devil’s Snare when I was in his hospital room. Sorry, about that.” Harry spoke for the first time since Tonks began her explanation.

“It happens, Harry, don’t worry about it,” Marcus said. “Have you ever seen Devil’s Snare before?”

“Yes, I have, my first year. I fell into a large nest of it.”

“Interesting, I didn’t know Hogwarts left that kind of stuff lying around for the students to get into. All the same, you are here now and probably wondering what we have planned.”

“Thought did cross my mind once or twice, sir.” Harry was trying to stay respectful.

“I am Marcus, not sir. We go by our first names or our cover names. You will get one as time goes on. Only your teammates, Horace, and I will know your real names. Our operatives are required have their faces concealed at all times while working. You can choose to tell your team who you are if you want, but many don’t. The operatives are part-timers meaning that they all have jobs somewhere else in our community. Do you understand how we work?”

“Yes, it makes sense,” Harry replied. “Where do I fit in then? I am still in school so how can I help?”

“You can’t help,” Horace interjected. “You know nothing and are of little use to anyone.”

“But, it is Horace’s job to teach you to be able to help us and he loves his job, don’t you Horace?” Marcus said in a friendly way cutting off the sharp criticism.

“Sod off you git,” was the reply. “I work my arse off trying to teach these fools not to get themselves or others killed while working. I don’t know what to do about you, Potter. A little young and scrawny if you ask me.”

“All things that can be remedied, Horace,” Marcus said. “I expect great things from you, Harry.”

“You and everyone else,” Harry said under his breath quietly and for the first time Horace moved on his own and came into the light. He was an older man with a fair share of wrinkles. He had mostly grey hair with a few black ones scattered about his head. He had a solid build and was rough looking but a lot better than Moody.

"I have excellent ears, Potter," he said showing something other than contempt. "I do want a chance to see what you can do. Maybe you aren't all that you are cracked up to be in the papers."

"I wouldn't believe anything written about me in the papers, Horace. I could count the number of accurate things on one hand." Harry thought that this man was a lot like his uncle with a little of Moody thrown in to add a certain level of craziness.

"Is that so, Potter," Horace smiled for the first time since the meeting began and Harry felt more than saw the eagerness he was displaying. "I will be ready when you are, Marcus. Send him my way when you get done with all your paper pushing." Horace stood and left the room silently.

"He is such a friendly person don't you think, Harry?" Marcus said with a wide smile. "Don't worry; he will warm up to you in time."

"Umm, yeah, I will believe that when I see it," Harry said doubtfully.

"Yes, well, on to the boring stuff," Marcus pulled a folder from the seat of a chair that was next to him. "We have a few things to settle before you can leave and start playing around with Horace. I have a secrecy letter here that you need to read and sign. I have a few other things for you to read over and I must cast a spell that we use to protect our department. If you will be so kind as to read this." Marcus slid the folder to Harry.

Looking at Tonks for confirmation and getting it, Harry opened the folder and started reading the top form.

"I, *the undersigned*, do here by swear a wizard's oath to keep my orders, missions, leaders, and teams secret from all unauthorized people. I will keep my secrets until my death or am ordered to reveal such secrets..."

Harry read the whole document and took the offered quill, which was a familiar black. "A blood quill. Must I sign this with a blood quill?"

"When have you ever seen a blood quill?" Marcus asked. "They are highly restricted in their use and illegal for most people to possess."

"Last year, Dolores Umbridge had me using it during detentions. I still have the faint scars on my hand from using it."

"What?" Yelled Tonks. "Why that miserable hag."

"Most interesting," Marcus said calmly while watching Tonks cycle through different 'angry' hair colors. "She could get a written reprimand for this. Maybe even a demotion since Fudge isn't really in a position to save anyone lately. I never liked that woman. Thoughts for another time. Yes, Harry you must use the quill. It will make the contract magically binding."

"Fine," Harry said succinctly. He signed his name with a flourish and ignored the scratching pain on his hand. He never broke eye contact with Marcus during the process. Harry handed the form to Marcus and he took the sheet quickly.

"I think you have that stare down, Harry. I know I can see why a few people are intimidated by you. Now, if we can finish the forms. The next one is a release form absolving the department of any liability should you get hurt or die."

"Imagine that," Harry was beginning to see how things worked in the Ministry. Paper them to death if you can. "Does Hogwarts have one of these? I only ask considering all the times I have been hurt while at school."

"Of course they do," Marcus said. "Most likely your guardians signed it when you went for your first year."

"Not likely," Harry said swiftly. "If the sheet promised injuries, then they would have signed. Otherwise, I doubt there is one signed by anybody I know."

"Someone had to sign it for you to attend Hogwarts," Marcus looked puzzled. "You can look into that when you go on your first mission. Everyone loves their first mission, don't they, Chamel?"

"The first is a lot of fun, Marcus. I still remember mine. Good times." Tonks got a little reminiscent.

“Why do they call you Chamel?” Harry asked.

“It is short for chameleon, Harry. Horace spent a few weeks trying to think up one that would fit. Chamel fit and that has been it since. I kind of like it too. It is a fun name just like me.” Tonks was starting to bounce in her seat.

“Whatever makes you happy, Tonks,” Harry shook his head a few times but was stopped when she smacked him playfully.

“Interesting,” Marcus said more to himself than anyone else. “Now if we can continue with the boring stuff you can get onto the fun stuff.”

Harry signed the release form and the salary sheet which said that Harry would be paid a lump sum for his training, 200 galleons, plus all his supplies and equipment. He would receive a sum based on the type of missions from that point forward. When they got to the Next of Kin form, Harry paused.

“I have no next of kin.”

“Well, then you can name a person or persons who you would like to handle your affairs. If you have a will, then we can just put that down,” Marcus was being pretty flexible about everything.

“Let’s do that then,” Harry didn’t know what else to do so he took the only route we could. *‘I will take care of that when I have to deal with Sirius’s will.’*

Harry came to the last form and he noticed that there was a certain shimmer to the parchment. Reading the top, Harry saw that there were quite a few magical words on the paper. He looked up and found Marcus was standing for the first time. The man was about five foot ten and seemed at ease on his feet. When he drew his wand, Harry reacted the only way he knew to react when someone pulled a wand, he drew his own wand.

He leapt out of his chair sending it crashing to the floor and swung his wand on target, Marcus, and took up a defensive position. “What is going on here? What is with the wand?”

Marcus stopped his motions and calmly pointed his wand downwards and away from Harry. "My apologies, Harry. I should have explained the process before drawing my wand on you. As unusual as it sounds, I rarely have people coming onboard who have had to fight for their lives before. It is even rarer that they have had to fight like you have. That is a mistake that I won't make again."

Harry stared Marcus down trying to figure out if he was being truthful or if he was being setup. So far Harry knew he had been pretty easy going about everything. He didn't make a fuss when he signed any of the forms. He looked to Tonks who had an expectant look on her face.

"This is normal, Harry," Tonks said. "Marcus is okay, I trust him. I should have warned you too. Remember, I know what happens when you get startled. I can clearly remember you knocking me down yesterday and what happened after that." She was being cheeky again and in front of her boss too.

"Is this a favorite thing of yours, Tonks?" Harry asked fighting the blush that he knew was starting to appear. "Okay, I am sorry about my reaction, but having so many people after you tends to make you a little jumpy."

"I completely understand, Harry" Marcus said with a smile. "I am impressed by your reflexes. I will need to make a bet with Horace before you start your training. I think I have an edge this time. Now, back to things at hand. You have to sign that form before we go any further today. There is another place to sign if you pass your entrance tests. I must cast a spell on you when you sign it both times."

"What kind of spell?" Harry wasn't taking any chances on this. *'I will be informed the whole time or I will leave. I am done trusting others to do what is best for me.'*

"The spell is a form of the Fidelius Charm. We adapted it to protect our information, identities, and secrets from others. Legilimency can not be used to extract this information because it is protected by the spell. You can not tell others who aren't covered by the same spell for the same reasons. It is another failsafe that only the Operations side goes through. As you sign the form, I will cast the spell and you will feel a slight presence in your mind. This is normal and it will pass in a

few seconds. It is not unlike the real Fidelius Charm but we are not hiding a place or thing with it.”

“Okay, let’s get this over with.” Harry took up the quill again and signed the form and heard Marcus murmuring as he wrote his name in spiky letters. When he finished, Harry felt the presence as he was told. The feeling remained for a few seconds then it faded until Harry couldn’t tell where it had gone. He handed Marcus the folder and his signed form.

“Wonderful, now let’s get you to Horace. I am sure he has had more than enough time to prepare. Follow me and feel free to talk amongst yourselves until Horace calls on you to start.”

They left room number nine and continued down the hallway. Tonks continued tripping on the runner so Harry had positioned himself to catch her should she actually fall instead of stumble. The area of hallway they were walking in had no doors for long distance on the right side. Harry saw one single door up ahead and then more blank wall for a good distance again.

“Before you ask, Harry, this is the training room,” Tonks said while stumbling enough she had to reach out a hand to Harry to steady herself. “This is the room you will hate at first and then come to love later. I know that I hated it for a few days.”

“Is this where I will be tested?” Harry asked.

“Yep,” Tonks replied. “Do your best with everything that is thrown at you. Do not hold anything back for any reason, okay? Consider everything to be a real situation and treat every opponent as you would a Death Eater.”

“Alright, I think,” Harry wasn’t sure what to expect.

Marcus mumbled a password and opened the lone door. He entered and walked farther into the room. Tonks and Harry followed. Harry’s first impression was disbelief. The room was wider than the wall space outside led you to believe and it extended nearly eighty feet. The ceiling was at least forty feet high and it was shrouded in darkness in some areas. The room was at least one hundred and fifty

feet deep. The volume of the room was immense and Harry could feel a charge to the air in the room. He could feel the air move too. Harry stood near the door and simply looked around for a few minutes.

“Amazing room isn’t it, Harry” Tonks said with some awe to her voice. “I love coming in here. It feels alive doesn’t it? You can feel the magic, but that shouldn’t be anything new to you.”

“It feels alive,” Horace snapped trying to keep his voice as overwhelming as he could, “because it kind of is. The walls are a metallic grey for a reason. The whole room is covered in the skin from Ukrainian Ironbellies. Our research team managed to figure out a way to keep the skin alive, in a fashion, so it could heal itself from spell damage. This, Potter, is our training room. This magnificent room is completely sealed from external detection so you being a minor and all is not an issue.

“Operations team members are the best trained operatives in the Ministry. My job is to test you and to ensure that you can put our training to use should the need arise. I had one person who knew every spell ever written. He was a master at casting those spells too. He had one flaw that cost him his life and the lives of his team members. He couldn’t use those spells against an enemy when the shite was hitting the fan. He got confused and he died. If you are anything like him, I will kill you myself so you won’t do the same to every else. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Harry said simply giving his full attention to Horace. Harry noticed Tonks and Marcus exiting through a door to the right side of the room adjacent to the entrance.

“Glad you can hear me, Potter,” Horace replied forcefully. “Here are the rules for your testing and all training moving forward should you pass. Everything goes. All spells are fair game. You can use anything, everything, and even shite you make up. There is only one spell that is not reversible and that is the Killing Curse. You can not use the Killing Curse while you are facing live opponents when in this room. If you kill someone using another spell, so be it. Shite happens, you move on. I have only lost two people while running this room and

both times they failed themselves. They died because of their own failures not because of the actions of others. Do you understand those rules?"

"Yes," Harry wasn't sure what was going to happen, but this whole thing was looking more real and serious as he went.

"Your first test, Potter," Horace stated. "If I throw a decapitation curse at you, what will you do?"

"I will try to stun you."

"Wrong," Horace stepped forward and tried to look even more menacing. "Schoolboy ideals, how grand. No, Potter, you fire an equally dangerous spell back at me. Do you know of any that would come close?"

"I haven't used it, but the Bone-Exploding Curse could be one."

"Excellent, you got it right on the second try. Too bad you are missing your head at this point and we only have a few seconds to repair the damage. You have to think fast on your feet, Potter, or people will get killed. Give me another spell you could use not one you know about."

"The Cruciatus Curse."

"You sure you could handle that one? It is mighty dangerous to play around with. Have you ever cast that spell?" Horace saw the hesitation in Harry. "Just like the spells, no words leave this room either. We are all under secrecy oaths and we govern ourselves. The Ministry kind of stops at the hidden door out front if you couldn't tell."

"Yes, I have used it once."

"Well, knock me over with a feather. The boy wonder isn't all goody-goody after all. And just who felt the sting of your first Cruciatus Curse?"

"Bellatrix Lestrange."

Horace held his comment and watched as Harry's face turned a little darker. He looked over Harry's shoulder and smiled slightly. "How surprising. Maybe you aren't that worthless after all, Potter. You would be the first other than that raving lunatic calling himself a Dark Lord to have accomplished such a feat. Maybe I won't go easy on you today. Maybe you can take the real test instead of the kid's version. Interested?"

"Ready as I'll ever be." Harry stared him down. He was getting mad and he didn't even want to try to use Occlumency to calm down. The man was pissing him off and Harry wanted to prove that he was good enough to learn what ever they had to offer.

"Fine, the test begins now. No Killing Curses, yell out yield when you have had enough, I will stop when you lose consciousness otherwise."

With a tap of his wand, Horace disappeared and the room shifted into that of a forest. Harry looked all around and saw old trees where nothing had been before. He stepped to his left side and touched a tree. It felt real. The bark was rough and the ground was uneven beneath his feet. He smelled the fresh air and grass and felt the dampness of the forest around him. *'Must be like the Room of Requirement.'* Harry figured that standing in one place was not the best choice so he began to move to his left checking for a structure or a clearing.

Harry walked for a few minutes before he had that feeling of someone attacking him. Harry spun and held his wand in the direction of the feeling. A silver ribbon of magic came flying at him from a tree where his wand was pointed. Harry reacted by ducking and sending a Reductor Curse to the same area. The silver ribbon flew over his head and struck a tree that was about a foot thick. The tree groaned from the impact. Where the spell had hit the tree the wood separated and the top slammed into the earth with a deep thud.

Harry moved behind the cover of some trees and small bushes. A burst of fire ignited the shrubs and Harry cast the Flame Freezing spell on himself and jumped into the fire. He saw movement to his right so he fired the Blasting Curse in that direction and moved out of

the fire. Harry heard a loud splintering of wood sound come from the poor tree that had been hit by his spell.

He retreated for a few minutes and found a dip in the earth where he had more cover from his attacker. He moved up and down the depression until he had that feeling again. He turned to the general direction and starting firing off Stunners and Impediment Jinxes. A twisting red jet of light shot from the area Harry had been firing his spells. The spell nearly hit Harry, but he had rolled to the ground before he was struck. *'Bloody hell, he wasn't kidding. That was the Cruciatus Curse.'*

Harry knew he was outclassed when it came to the number of spells he knew. He thought he might have an advantage when it came to mobility, but he knew he couldn't match spell for spell against Horace. Harry scanned the area for movement and saw nothing. He needed a way to even the odds and thought of a smoke spell. He cast the spell which caused smoke to billow from his wand. He waved it around and soon found himself obscured by the cloud of smoke. He felt that feeling again and fired the Cutting Curse it that direction. He heard something tear and heard a grunt from someone.

Harry knew he had to press any advantage he made for himself and began firing Reductor Curses in a small angle from the last place he had heard Horace. Trees were being destroyed from the sounds of things. Crashes and creaks followed by the splintering sounds of wood being pulverized. Harry began to move sideways from his last position and saw a yellow streamer fly right where he had been standing.

Harry moved further away and wished he had learned the Disillusionment Charm last year. That was the only way Horace could have remained unseen. As Harry thought, he remembered what Horace had said in the meeting room. *"I have excellent ears, Potter."* *'Idiot,'* Harry thought to himself. He wandlessly cast the Silencing Charm on his feet and continued his retreat.

Harry had kept moving for over ten minutes without any spells being fired at him. He was trying to think of a way to go on the offensive but not knowing where your enemy was made that hard. Harry was

coming up on a creek by the sound of it. He broke through the underbrush and found a wide stream running steadily and some rocks creating a path of sorts. The only way across was to hop from rock to rock. Harry got an idea and hopped across the only place where the rocks were close enough to do so.

Harry paused in the middle of crossing and bent down to splash some water over a smaller stone. Once the rock was covered, Harry wandlessly cast the Freezing Charm on the rock turning the water into ice. Harry was pleased that the rock just looked wet. He finished crossing the stream and climbed up the hill to a vantage point behind a few live trees and a fallen one. He could see up and down the stream quite a ways and he had the best view of the rocks. Harry waited and caught his breath.

The minutes ticked by and Harry watched. A slight movement of the first rock brought his wand to bear on the approximate location of his pursuer. Harry knew he had to focus as much as possible. He had to force as much of his magic into his spells. Tonks had been giving him skills and hints at becoming better with his magic. She knew what was going to happen and she helped him as much as she could in the two days they had before today. Harry chose his spell and summed up all the intent and willpower he could and waited for a more conclusive indication that Horace was crossing the stream.

The moment that Harry heard a "Shite!" and a splash, he unleashed repeated stunning spells blanketing the area near the ice-covered stone. A silver shield appeared slightly down stream from the rocks and Harry adjusted his aim. He was firing spell after spell and the silver shield sounded each time it was struck. Harry was pouring his magic into the spells. He was beginning to feel that 'pushing' sensation he had when doing wandless magic.

The silver shield held, but no spells were being returned. Harry held his current course of action because he didn't know what would happen if he didn't. A cold feeling broke his concentration. He started hearing his mother's screams in his head. *'Dementors.'*

Harry ducked down and moved away from the stream. He summoned up all his will and intent remembering the time he saved Sirius. He

thought of the strongest positive memory he could think of too. Tonks in a t-shirt minus her pants kissing him was the one he selected. Harry pushed all the magic he could into yelling, "Expecto Patronum," and cast his Patronus. The silver stag erupted from his wand and charged into the woods to Harry's right. Harry thought the stag was larger than before, but now was not the time to think about anything other than surviving.

Deciding that the right was full of Dementors, Harry ran to the left. He kept running bouncing off trees and breaking through brush. His face was getting cut up by the angry twigs that would snap at him as he ran past. The stag came running or floating by and went ahead of Harry. A screeching sound told Harry that Dementors were ahead of him as well as behind. He veered slightly to the right and saw a clearing up ahead.

Hoping that a clearing meant a better chance to see his opponent, Harry ran for the open space. The Dementor screams grew quieter as Harry progressed giving him a more positive feeling of his current direction. The open space was a yard to an old farm house. Harry saw a paddock behind the house and a water troth waiting for an animal to drink from it. The house appeared to be well maintained and its thatched roof looked new in the sunlight. Harry saw no movement in or around the house so he ran up the walking path leading to the side door.

A quick "Alohomora" and the door swung open allowing Harry to run in at full speed. He closed the door and muttered "Colloportus" locking the door behind him. Harry ran up the stairs and found a bedroom with a window overlooking the way he had come. He opened the windows and eased back into the shadows making sure he had a good view of the tree line. Harry took the time to catch his breath. *'This is one of the stupidest things you have ever done, Harry. What in the fuck are you trying to prove? Who are you trying to prove it to and why does it matter? Ah, got you.'*

Harry stopped berating himself when he saw the outline of a shape emerging from the woods. Horace was using the Disillusionment Charm and the sunlight allowed Harry to see his outline instead of it being hidden by the trees and leaves in the forest. Harry lined up his

wand and forced his magic out again. "Incarcerous," Harry said quietly. Ropes leapt from his wand and quickly wrapped around the hidden shape. The ropes followed the shape to the ground as it fell over.

Harry ran from the room, down the stairs, and out the door, he had sealed closed, after removing the locking spell. He found his ropes lying in a pile where he had seen Horace collapse. "Damn it," Harry managed to say before being struck by a Bludgeoning spell. Harry rolled with the force and regained his feet fighting to take a breath since his chest had taken most of the force.

Harry fired a Cutting Curse in the direction he could best figure the spell came from. Hearing no impact, Harry swung his wand in an arc casting "Flagrate" in all directions. He saw a shield snap into existence to his left so he focused his spells to that area. Stunners, Reductors, and Impedimentas were fired repeatedly. Harry saw the shield weaken slightly and the Disillusionment Charm fade.

Horace was standing there looking a little beaten sporting own cuts and burns from Harry's attacks. With an angry scowl, Horace ducked and fired the Cruciatus Curse at Harry causing him to dive out of the way. Horace followed it up with his own Incarcerous spell. Harry countered with the Cutting Curse and followed it up with a Stunner.

Horace batted the stunner away looking insulted that Harry would even try. Harry knew that he had to use something stronger than his school hexes. Harry remembered the spells he had read during his first day home. "Ossis Fragmen," Harry said quietly trying to remember that yelling did little to help your magic. The spell struck Horace in the left arm and Harry heard a bone snapped loudly. Horace held back his yell, but a whimper escaped.

Harry continued his assault with another Reductor Curse which was blocked. Horace fired another Cruciatus Curse at Harry forcing him to the ground. Harry returned fire with "Ossis Disffringo." Horace was struck in the left leg. The sound of his leg bone shattering was drowned out by his yell of pain as he fell to the ground instantly.

Harry regained his footing but was brought to his knees when Horace scored a hit with "Crucio." Harry did his best to hold in his screams,

but he was disoriented by the pain. He was seeing stars as the hot knives drove themselves into his joints. Harry tried to roll away from the pain, but he figured in reality he was merely rolling around in the same place.

Horace must have stopped his spell because Harry regained control of his body. *'Never again will I take the pain from that spell. Where is that arsehole, I want him to hurt?'* Harry shakily got to his knees and saw Horace on the ground ten feet away trying to steady his wand on Harry. Horace was still trying to cast a spell at Harry even though he was lying on the ground.

Harry drew up his wand and stared into Horace's eyes. "Crucio!" Harry pushed all the pain he had suffered from Horace and his family in the last few days into his spell. He added a little of his hatred for Bellatrix too. Horace was laid flat on the ground, screaming, from Harry's spell. Harry held him under the spell wanting him to feel every bit of his anger and suffering he had. A shout from the side caused Harry to break off his spell and turn his wand on the voice.

A Reductor Curse shot from Harry's wand and flew towards the voice. Harry couldn't see who it was, but he was still disoriented from the Cruciatus Curse he had been under for an undetermined amount of time. A feminine shout of the shield spell helped Harry re-center himself to reality. His vision came back into focus and he saw Tonks moving his way warily with her wand drawn. She was recovering from her dive to the ground to avoid his 'Crucio' spell.

Harry looked down at his wand and back up at Tonks. He released his wand and it fell to the grass softly. Tonks stowed her wand and fell to her knees a little out of control right in front of him. She pulled him into a hug and held him as he took deep breaths assessing his injuries.

"It is over, Harry," Tonks said near tears. "I am sorry I brought you here. I didn't know they were planning such real test. I am so sorry, Harry."

Harry didn't know what the big deal was, but he knew Tonks had to calm down. "Hush, Tonks. I am fine no big deal. Just a little pain.

Nothing I haven't been through before. This is par for me, remember?"

"Harry, you have serious injuries and you were held under the Cruciatus for way too long. We ran down here as soon as you were hit with it. I need to get you to the healers right now."

"What injuries? I am just a little tired and sore, no worries." Harry pushed Tonks back and started trying to get to his feet. He was shaky but he managed.

Tonks didn't know what to do, but she helped Harry stand up and kept him from falling over. Marcus watched Harry stand and looked at Horace still curled into a ball on the ground. He saw Harry waver a few times, but when Harry's wand flew into his hand Marcus knew something was going on and it was a good thing.

"You lost, old man," Marcus said with a laugh to Horace. He received a grunt of pain followed by a whimper. "I will just call the medics then." Marcus snapped his wand in the direction of the door and a silvery shape shot out of it. Marcus walked over to Harry and Tonks assessing his condition more thoroughly.

"The healers are on their way, Harry. I need your face covered since you have most definitely passed the test." He conjured a grey hood that would cover Harry's face and placed it over his head. "Harry, I am going to heal the cuts on your face and then cover it so no one knows who you are. Okay?"

Harry looked to Tonks who nodded. Harry sighed and gave his permission. Marcus waved his wand a few times and the small cuts healed. Harry's face was covered with the hood, but he could still see Tonks worried face.

Tonks pulled the hood of her cloak up and her face was shrouded instantly in shadows. "Remember to call me Chamel, Harry. I won't say your name when the healers arrive. They will want to take you to the medical wing because of your injuries."

"What injuries? I didn't get hit that much."

“Your left arm is broken, Harry,” Tonks explained. “You have a puncture wound to your leg and a burn on your chest not to mention the exposure to the Cruciatus Curse.”

“I don’t remember anything but the curse and that was at the end. When did the rest happen?”

“The whole time you were fighting,” Tonks was really worried that Harry couldn’t remember getting hit by the spells. “Now, you rest and we will let the healers do their thing.”

The door opened and the healers entered the normal-looking room. There were five people, two women and three men, and they hurried over to Harry and Marcus. One of the women started giving orders and the others began their work. Wands were waved and spells cast.

“Broken arm, shattered leg, fire burns, rope burns, contusions, and Crucio exposure,” a man said.

“Broken arm, penetrating wound, lacerations, fire burns, and Crucio exposure,” said a woman.

The woman in charge shook her head, “What is this, Marcus, a final aptitude test or something?”

“No, Speers, it was an admission test,” Marcus said lightly.

“Admission my arse, these are serious wounds. If this is what I can expect in the future I demand that a healer be present during the testing. I don’t even want to know what spells missed.” Speers directed the healers to levitate Horace and walk Harry to the medical bay.

Harry shook off their help and leaned on Tonks urging her to lead the way. *‘I will do things myself if I can. If not, I will ask for help if I need it.’* Harry walked slowly after the healers. They repeatedly tried to help him, but he waved them off every time. It took Tonks telling them to let him alone before they stopped offering to help.

The medical bay was right across from the training room which Harry thought was the most sense he had ever seen at use in this building.

He was laid on a bed and his healer team started pouring potions down his throat. He was poked and prodded and scanned and measured. Tonks sat with him the whole time giving him all the support he could stand.

He heard various things from the other side of the room. Most of it was medical talk that he didn't understand and couldn't be bothered to figure out since his medication had started working. Marcus was in the room speaking with someone, but Harry was starting to drift off. His arm was throbbing from the Skele-Grow he had taken. The last face he saw was Tonks' covered head hovering above him.

Harry came to with the smell of disinfectant in his nose and the sounds of people talking quietly reaching his ears. He opened his eyes and immediately noticed that his glasses were somewhere other than his face. He willed them into his hand and soon found them resting lightly in his palm. He carefully slipped them on and the world came into focus or what he could see with his hood in place.

He saw three healers moving about the room straightening things and restocking shelves. He also saw Horace resting in his own bed. There were empty potion bottles of varying sizes next to his bed. He seemed to be asleep at the moment, but Harry could clearly remember what the man had done to him earlier. Harry wished he knew what time it was, but since there were no windows he had no clues to go from.

Looking to his side, Harry found Tonks slouching in a chair. Her eyes were closed, but she was humming a tune to herself. Harry looked to see if he saw anyone else in the room but it was empty. The room was smaller than Madam Pomfrey's hospital, but it was well supplied judging by cabinets of potions that lined the back wall. Everything was in perfect order and labeled from what Harry could tell. He turned his attention back to Tonks and cleared his throat quietly.

Tonks' eyes snapped open and a smile grew on her face. She sat up and leaned forward coming closer to Harry. "Do you hate me?" Her smile had disappeared and a hesitant frown was in its place.

"No, why would I?" Harry didn't know what to say.

"I got you hurt," Tonks said tentatively. "Most people would be pretty horked off at me for doing something like that."

"And when have I ever been like most people? Honestly, I spend my summer doing wandless magic, getting my life threatened, and getting cursed left and right in a secret department under the Ministry. Does that sound like most people? Didn't think so. I am fine, To...Chamel. I feel good right now aside from feeling a little sore and not completely with it."

"Good," Tonks hesitated saying Harry. "You were amazing. Horace hadn't had such a fight in years. He usually toys with people and then finishes it. When he starts throwing the Cruciatus Curse around, you know you are doing something right. That is his finisher. I still remember when he used it on me."

"It was bad, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't that terrible. He has nothing on Voldemort or Bellatrix." Harry saw Tonks flinch. "If you are going to spend any amount of time around me get used to me saying Voldemort. I have earned the right to call him whatever I want and I intend to do just that."

"Not everyone has faced him so we aren't all at your level of acceptance. Most people have never seen him in person. Why do you think he is so scary? The less you know about something, the scarier it is."

"Well, I have seen him and he is scary in person too, but that is no reason to give him more power by being afraid of his made up name. His real name is Tom Marvolo Riddle. He just made up Voldemort by messing around the letters. Anyway, what do I do now? And what time is it?"

"Those I can answer. It is around two and we are to meet Marcus before we get you outfitted. Then, we have your first mission to complete before we can leave."

"I have a mission, already?"

"Oh, it is an easy mission. You don't even have to leave the Ministry. That will be explained later. Now up you get so we can go shopping."

“Shopping? Why do women like shopping so much?”

“Because it gives us pleasure and we get new things that we didn't have before. Now let's go.”

“Fine, fine.” Harry swung his legs off the edge of his bed and set them on the floor. He tested his steadiness and then forced himself into a standing position. He swayed to the right, but Tonks grabbed his shoulders stopping him from falling.

“So you are up,” called a healer. She bustled over like all healers do. *‘They must be taught how to do that in medical school,’* Harry thought.

“Here,” she said handing him a vial. “You must take that before you leave. It will perk you up and help you with your balance issues. You should be as good as new in a few minutes.”

Harry took the offered greenish potion and downed it quickly. He expected an awful taste and frightening texture so he didn't believe the sweet taste he was met with. It flowed down his throat smoothly. Harry found himself perking up in the few minutes as promised. His balance wasn't perfect, but it was constantly improving.

She waved him out the door faster than he had ever seen a healer do so. He allowed Tonks to lead him past door number sixteen, the training room, to door number two. She knocked and helped Harry in when the door opened.

Harry found himself in a room that felt old. Everything in the room seemed modeled from the 1800's. The lights were old style gas lamps similar to the ones in Grimmauld Place only more basic. There was a book shelf over flowing with books that were stuck in at every direction they would fit. There were three green leather chairs facing the antique desk that Marcus was seated behind. The desk was clear in the center, but papers were piled high around the edges. Quills were lying about the desk in various stages of wear.

Marcus looked up from his high-backed leather chair and smiled a wide smile that seemed to fit the man. “You are free to speak here, Harry. This room is constantly protected against all forms of

eavesdropping. Now, I need you to sign the last form again if you wish to enter our program, of course.”

Harry looked from Marcus’s hopeful face to Tonks’ caring one. “Yeah, I think I will as long as I will learn things that can help me stay alive. If I am just going to be a punching bag or poster boy, then I am out.”

“None of that will happen here, Harry. We don’t have poster boys for one, kind of defeats the secrecy thing doesn’t it? As for the punching bag part, it may seem like it for the initial stages, but I think you can progress beyond that quickly enough. Here is the form and the nasty quill again.”

Harry grabbed the quill and paused thinking what he should have thought long ago. *‘Am I just trading one controlling old man for another? This one is telling me he will teach me things and I have the chance to learn on my own if need be. The other one said he would teach me, but all I got was Snape and no information. The real difference is that I am choosing to do this. I never had the choice before. That is the real truth; I am deciding to do this under my own power. I am making the decisions.’* “This is for real? I will learn everything I saw today and more?”

“Yes, I promise that you will learn what you saw today and more. You will also learn how and when to apply those skills depending on the situation. Sometimes, we are a very direct group of people. Other times, we work in subterfuge. If you are willing to give it a shot, sign the form. You can always back out if things don’t work out for you. I will warn you that your oaths will last for your entire life and we may decide to Oblivate certain things if we think they are excessively dangerous for us. That is the deal you are walking into. It is your choice?”

Harry thought about the situation for awhile. “Fine, I am in.” Harry signed his name again and felt Marcus’s spell at work. The presence was more pronounced than before and took longer to fade. “It is normal for the second time to be more invasive. It is the level of permanence causing it. Now, if you go to room number eighteen you can get outfitted. I am sure Chamel can help you with that. I wish to welcome you to our family, Harry Potter. We may not trust many

people often, but we rely on everyone who takes the oath. Oh, and on a side note, you won me a case Ogden's Finest with your performance today. Thank you."

Tonks grabbed Harry's arm and pulled him out of the office and down the hall. "He bet a case on you and you came through. You earned points with him today. I am proud of you." They continued down the hallway and Tonks seemed to regain her clumsy ways. Harry had to stop her from falling twice on the way to room eighteen. She tapped the door with her wand and said a word causing the door to shudder and open.

Harry entered the room and saw, stuff. It was full of stuff. One wall had cloaks lined up in one really long rack. They were all grey and seemed rather common. The back wall had a few swords and daggers with matching leather gear beneath them. The wall opposite the cloaks had shelves of books and various magical devices that Harry recognized from Dumbledore's office and Moody's classroom. The center of the room had boots in the far section and small trunks in the near section.

"Okay, we are here to outfit you. First is a cloak." Tonks walked over to the cloaks and started sliding down the rack checking the length every now and then. She paused about half way down and pulled one from the rack and held it up to Harry. It was about a foot too long. "Not quite right, eh," She returned the cloak and walked down until she seemed happy.

Tonks pulled another cloak out and the length was about two inches from the floor but the shoulders were about six inches too wide. "Now you can see why I didn't get the job at Madam Malkin's." Tonks returned the cloak and checked for one with smaller shoulders. She pulled out another one and held up it to Harry. "Not bad, try it on will you."

Figuring he might as well play dress up for her, Harry removed his hood and donned the cloak. It fit nicely in length but the shoulders were a touch too large. Harry's original opinion of the cloaks being common had to be revised. The material was soft and very

comfortable. The room was like most clothes storerooms, stuffy and warm, but the cloak felt nice and cool.

“A little too big, but it will do. Now, to brief you on your brand-new, slightly-used, Unspeakable wear, I will list off their handy dandy features.” Tonks finished with a flourish. “I love doing that in case you couldn’t tell. The standard cloak is made up of two parts; the outer and inner. Kind of like a belly button only this thing has a much greater lint factor and isn’t a button since it has no buttons.”

Harry nodded his head twice before switching to a shake. *‘Tonks is another of those crazy people I should watch out for.’*

Tonks never paused in her description. “The inner is made up of a soft liner the muggles make. The outer is all us though. The exterior is made up of three separate materials. Hungarian Horntail hide is overlaid with the hair of a Demiguise interwoven with the skin of a Grand Chameleon. The dragon hide gives us added protection from spells. The Demiguise hair gives us the ability to disappear to a certain degree. It isn’t as good as an invisibility cloak, but then it is cheaper than that too. Remember, this is government work so you settle for less than spectacular equipment. The Chameleon skin gives us the ability to blend into our environment.

“The invisibility can be activated by tapping your wand on the cloak, or wandlessly I guess, and saying ‘Invisible.’ Real technical stuff we have to remember here. The Chameleon feature is more versatile. Same tap and you say ‘blend,’ or ‘color’ then the color you want. I like grey or blue or really any color actually. You will want black or another normal color I suppose.”

“That is me, Tonks, boring.”

“You are far from boring, Harry. You simply haven’t been properly motivated to try new things. That is where I come in just so you know. Now, on with other features. Self-cleaning upon command. Wrinkle-free always. Temperature control to keep you nice and warm or comfortably cool. A hood that has Obscuring Charms in place to hide your face and a security feature to prevent others from removing it but one of us. Don’t ask me how, it just works that way. Built-in wand holder for either arm that can be activated by thought. There is a spell

to attune you to it so it all works right. Enough pockets that you will lose stuff for weeks and the kicker is that they are summon proof too. So when you lose something and try to summon it you get naught. Tailors with a sense of humor.

“Is there anything else?” Tonks thought on the subject for a bit. “Umm, that is all I can think of. Now that you have your new threads, let’s get you some boots.”

The section of boots was searched and Harry found a pair of boots that fit well. “Hungarian Horntail as well with the self-cleaning, temperature control, and Chameleon features. Your cloak is long enough that you can crouch a little so you don’t need the invisibility option. Remember, government work.”

“Now the trunks are all the same, Harry. They have a modest shrinking charm on them as they are one third the size of the real one. They can be shrunk more, but then they would be hard to find in here. Pick one and let’s open it up.” Harry grabbed one and set it on the floor. Tonks tapped it with her wand and countered the charm. The trunk grew to full size and Harry opened the lid. Inside was a blank journal, an empty set of vials, a sleeping bag, a canteen, a round clear ball similar to Neville’s Remembrall, a self-inking quill, a Pocket Sneakoscope, and a few storage cubbies.

“You know what most of this crap is so I will only explain the odd things. The clear ball is used to identify someone’s injuries. A medically skilled team member will use it. The journal is like most journals but it is never-ending. You are supposed to put all your notes in it. Basically, you will have your own spell book when you get into it. Otherwise, there is a pocket for this thing right near your belt line. Shrink it and put it in there.” Harry shrunk the trunk and put it in the pocket.

“Now we move onto the edged weapons. I am too clumsy to carry one so I don’t. Last thing I need to do is remove my own arm. You should grab one and a sheath and put it on the inside of your robe. There are access pockets so you can reach things on the inside.” Harry found a dagger that was about eight inches long and had a sturdy frame. He found a sheath that was slim and held the dagger

tightly preventing any accidents. He used the access pockets to store the dagger in an inner holder designed for a blade. Harry also tested out the wand holder in his sleeve.

Tonks said the spell to make the cloak respond to his wishes. After a few minutes testing the wand holder, Harry was satisfied with its response as his ability to catch the wand properly. "Well, I think we are done in here, Harry. You said you learn better by doing so we will skip the books for now. Anything else you need from here?"

"No, I think I am good for now. What do we do now?"

"Well, Harry, you need to get your hood up and you can cue me in so I can see your face. Don't ask me how it works; it is more of the Department secrets that I don't care to learn. Flip up the hood and once you are ready then tap the hood and say 'Reveal to' and the full name of the person." Tonks smile faded as she just realized she told Harry to say her real name.

Harry smiled at her and decided to have some fun with her. Tapping the hood, he spoke very clearly and slowly. "Reveal to Nymphadora Tonks." Harry saw Tonks hesitate slightly, but the smile returned.

"There I can see you just fine now. I will do the same so you can see me." Tonks followed the same procedure and Harry could see her face clearly as if the hood wasn't there.

"Neat trick, Tonks. Where to now?"

"Back to the man in charge, he has to give you your mission for the day. You should have loads of fun with this one. I know I did." Tonks skipped out of the room and started down the hall. Harry followed her trying to keep up without running. He only caught up after she tripped and fell down completely. Harry assisted her to her feet and they finished the trip without skipping anymore.

The office door opened for them and Harry was greeted with a friendly smile. "Now you look like one of us. A little loose in the shoulders, but medical can fix that. Here is your ranking bar. Chamel can explain it later."

Harry looked at the patch and saw that it was made up of different colored, vertical bars underneath an empty horizontal bar that went the whole length of the patch. The patch was about two inches long and one inch tall. Harry found the location for it over his left breast right where the Hogwarts House patch would go. Harry affixed the patch and let it pass from his mind.

“Your mission for the day, Harry, is a multipart mission. Since you are a minor according to the Ministry you are to infiltrate the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. More specifically, the Improper Use of Magic Office. Once there, you will locate the sensory device that has been attuned to you or your current location. You must disable the device without it being obvious. Hitting it with a Reductor Curse would be an example of how not to do it. A strong Freezing Charm could do it. The device only does something if it detects magic in its target area. So, it doing nothing is what we are after. I am sure you have no love lost with that particular department.

“The second part of your mission is to gain access to the main storeroom containing records on all magical people. You will place this form in your folder without being detected. The form is simply a legal document stating that you have been emancipated. Since you are under the age of seventeen, you must be emancipated to work in any capacity outside of a family business. Once I put our seal on the documents you signed, a record will be made of you entering into an employment contract. That is as detailed as it becomes, but if there isn't an emancipation document in your folder the clerk for the Wizengamot will be notified automatically.

“I know it sounds silly, but the Ministry has been mucking around in people's lives for centuries. They have some really stupid rules and procedures in place, but I see this as a fun challenge for you to test out your new toys. Do you have any questions?”

“Do I come back here when I am done or what? And how do I get in here anyway?”

“Great questions, Harry. You come back here when you are done. I will stamp the documents then. Now getting in here, you tap the wall like you saw Chamel and you say your password. You will set it the

first time you enter. I have already adjusted the wards to permit you entry into the door the first time. Once you learn some of the transportation methods we can adjust them to let you in other ways that are more convenient for you. Any more questions?"

"Don't think so."

"Brilliant. Now, Chamel will go with you, but she will not help you in your mission. She is only there to get you out of trouble should you get caught, but if that happens just cop an attitude and reveal your badge. Most people know to leave us be when we ask."

Harry looked down to see that his badge had indeed disappeared. He drew his wand and tapped it one causing it to reveal itself for a short time. Harry shook hands with Marcus, grabbed the document, and followed Tonks out of the offices. Once he left the secret door in the main hallway outside of the Department, he turned around and repeated the double-tap and the box-motions as he had seen Tonks do when they first arrived. He heard a faint voice ask for a password. Harry thought for a moment before saying his password, "Marauder's for the win."

He turned and walked towards the lift. He pressed the button and waited calmly as the lift worked its way towards level nine. "So, Chamel, what do the colors on the badge mean?"

Tonks tapped hers and the badge revealed itself. The colors went from left to right, red, blue, green, yellow, purple, and black. "The red bar is for offensive spells. The number of bars is a weighted average based on power, knowledge, and skill with the spells. Everyone needs to be at least a level three in red and blue to be added to a team. Blue is for defensive spells. Next is green and that is speed and accuracy of spells. A dueler would be really high in this area. Yellow is for healing spells and purple is for Stealth, Tracking, and the Covert skills. Last is black and that reflects your ability with the Unforgivables. Speed of casting, ability to hold them, and proficiency at fighting them.

"As you can see, I have five red out of seven. I would be in the upper end of the main group. Offensive spells are important to us. I have five bars of seven for blue. I am pretty skilled with my shields and

counter-curses. The Patronus falls into this group as well so you should have a good score here once they start measuring you. I have a five for speed and accuracy. Two in yellow makes me able to heal very minor wounds in a controlled environment. You have seen and been a patient of those skills and you are still alive so no worries there. I have six purples. My tendencies for tripping keep me from a seven. I am the highest of all team members in this area. I have a three for the Unforgivables. I can't hold the Cruciatus for very long and my Killing Curse is luck if it works. My Imperius is good, but my lack of raw power keeps me from a four.

"We can test as often or as seldom as we want to get our levels reassessed. At the beginning, people are always trying to get higher levels but over time they settle for what they have. The top bar indicates our rank and our team. I have a Roman Numeral III saying I am part of team three. I have two pips of five showing that I am a level two operative. A level one is a new member or someone who is still learning the ropes. A level three is the team leader.

A level four is a team leader and operation specialist meaning they can command multiple teams and have operational discretion if a mission becomes complicated by external forces. In short, if the mission is fucked a level four can change the mission to something attainable or call it off. A level five would be Horace and Marcus. They call the shots and plan the missions. I wouldn't want their job if you paid me. In the old days, there used to be level fives that went on missions and were consistently in the field but that is long past now.

"Let's see what they started you out as and don't worry about any of your levels right now. They are bound to go up." Tonks tapped Harry's hidden patch and her mouth dropped open. "Holy shite, you really must have impressed them earlier. You will make some friends and enemies among the teams with levels like this starting out." Harry looked down and saw the colored bars. Four red, three blue, 5 green, no yellow, two purple, and three black with one pip in the upper field.

"Everyone gains at least one level in all areas and many get an increase of two or more levels. You could be hitting sixes and maybe sevens in a few years. The pip and your levels in offensive and

defensive spells mean that you can be added to a team and sent on missions already.”

The lift arrived at that time and Harry couldn't wrap his head around everything. He just wanted to finish his mission and go home. He was tired and needed sleep not to mention he hadn't eaten yet. He knew it wasn't even four yet, but that didn't change the fact that he wanted to go to bed. He entered the lift and pressed number two. The lift rattled and started on its way to the floor containing the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and his first stop.

The lift paused on the seventh floor, the Department of Magical Games and Sports, and two people entered the lift hesitantly. Tonks and Harry were in the rear of the lift and in opposite corners. The newcomers looked up and down at Harry and Tonks before they continued their conversation in very hushed tones. Harry turned to see if Tonks was bothered by their actions at all. He saw her alternating her hair color randomly. She seemed completely oblivious to anyone else.

The lift proceeded to level five, Department of International Magical Cooperation, and one more person entered the lift. He was a stout little man and had wild mustache that seemed to reach his shoulders. He greeted one of the other men happily by name and struck up a conversation completely ignoring Harry and Tonks.

Without further interruption, the lift arrived at level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Harry wasn't sure how to exit the lift. He wasn't sure he could say anything or do anything. Tonks, however, didn't waste one minute. She cleared her throat and all three people in the way leapt to the sides making room for her to exit the lift without a risk of being touched. Tonks strode from the confined space exuding confidence with every step.

Harry followed trying to mimic her. He managed to keep up with her until the lift closed and continued to the first floor. “Is that normal? People reacting like that?”

“Yep, most are dead scared of us,” Tonks said stopping near one of the magical windows. “The whole secrecy thing really frightens some people. You will get used to all the whispering and hesitation. They

actually think we care about their business? Games does one event a year maybe two at the most. Otherwise, they just muck with the Quidditch leagues. Cooperation can't cooperate with themselves let alone others. One thing you will learn is that every department thinks their shite doesn't stink and their business is the most important. Ha, my arse."

"So, we want people to fear us?" Harry was beginning to wonder if the Unspeakables weren't like the Death Eaters only with different colored cloaks.

"No, but people always fear what they don't know. By nature, we are not to be known. Besides, if people are on their toes when we are around things go smoother. Half the time when we show up to something going on, people are ever so helpful to us. Now, on we go. People in the MLE are more used to us so they won't be jumping out of the way. Here is a hint, use your fancy new cloak if you want."

Harry looked at her and then remembered his cloak could become invisible to a certain degree. He also had his own invisibility cloak on him from when he originally arrived at the Ministry. Harry tapped his cloak and said, "Invisible," and he faded from sight with only a slight distortion giving him away. Harry wandlessly cast a silencing spell on his feet and pulled his own cloak from the inside pocket where he had stowed it. With a swirl, Harry disappeared completely from view.

He walked down the hallway ignoring the scenes the windows projected. He stopped at the door to the Auror Headquarters and took a deep breath. *'Now or nothing I guess.'* Harry turned the handle and was met with the sounds of a busy office. He slipped into the room silently and stayed close to the left wall. He saw a few people walking about discussing things and a few paper airplanes floating about near the ceiling.

Harry slinked his way to the rear of the room where a closed door sat beneath a small, hanging sign that read, 'Improper Use of Magic Office.' Under the sign was a name plate, 'Mafalda Hopkirk.' Harry recognized Hopkirk's name quite clearly. It was her letters that caused Harry so many problems last summer and before that during

his second year. Reaching the door, Harry tried to open the door slowly, but it was locked.

Harry wasn't sure what to do next. Usually this was when Hermione would jump in with an idea and it would work perfectly. *'No, Hermione here, now what? Well, if I want in I could always knock.'* Left with few options, Harry knocked softly so the aurors wouldn't hear it. *'I could use my wand to unlock the door but that would trigger the device in the room.'*

The door opened quickly nearly hitting Harry in the shoulder. He moved to the side against the wall. Mafalda looked out the doorway checking for a visitor. She saw no one right there so she looked around the door to see if anyone was hiding behind it. Harry thought he had a chance to sneak in, but she was blocking the entire doorway. *'She has to be at least a hundred kilos. How can I get past all that?'* Harry's moment of opportunity was fading quickly.

Mafalda finished her search mumbling under her breath about idle children and worthless gits and began to close the door. Harry started to panic a little. *'If this is a common problem then she won't open the door again. Do something you idiot.'* Harry saw the door closing and he had a few inches left before the door was locked again. He pushed his magic out and cast a Freezing Charm on the latch hoping it would work.

The door closed and Harry waited for a few minutes before slightly pushing on the door. It swung freely allowing Harry to breathe again. He waited for a lull in the noise of the auror's room before quickly slipping into the adjoining office. He closed the door knowing that Tonks was now two doors away from him should he get into trouble. He was alone until he left both offices. The mission was his alone at this point.

He heard quills on parchment coming from a room in the back. He had a short wall blocking his view of the small office where he knew Mafalda was waiting. He walked to the wall and peered over it. He saw a well kept desk directly behind the wall and Mafalda sitting there methodically sorting papers. *'She must have been Percy's idle before he was promoted to Fudge's staff.'* A large stack of papers were

already sitting in an out-going box. Harry saw another door in the rear of the office and the quill sound was coming from in there.

Harry slid around the short wall and worked his way to the rear door and found it to be unlocked, but Mafalda was sitting at her desk sorting papers. Harry saw a chance to get in without her noticing. He moved to the end of her desk and waited for her to look away. A few minutes later, she did, and Harry nudged the neatly stacked pile of papers causing them to slip out of alignment and begin to fall off the desk. Mafalda noticed the papers shift and reached out with her short arms and try to stop them from falling over. Her efforts only caused the stack to fall over in a very dramatic way.

Papers were scattered in all directions and Mafalda cursed once before getting out of her chair and started picking up the papers. Harry retreated to the back door and opened it when he saw the chance. Inside the room he saw at least thirty drum-like devices similar to old seismographs. There was a quill hovering above a piece of parchment near the base of the device. Harry saw labels on every machine and moved to get a better look. One read 'Wales,' another was 'South London,' another was 'North London.' The list kept going. Many major cities had their own device.

After a few minutes, Harry found the device he was after. He knew it was the one for him because it said so in dark writing, 'Harry Potter,' beneath his name was scribbled 'Surrey.' *'I hate Fudge. I wonder how long this thing has been trained on me. Well, now it is time to fix the problem.'* Harry pushed his magic with as much intent as he could and fired a Freezing Charm at the device.

Harry looked at the device and waited for something to happen. Nothing did. He knew he had cast the spell because he felt it happen just like when he was practicing at Privet Drive. After a few more minutes, he decided to test out using his wand. *'If it detects me, then I might have a chance to get the sheet before it is sent out.'* Harry grabbed his wand from his built-in holder and pointed the wand at the ceiling. "Wingardium Leviosa."

The machine did nothing. Harry tried the Shield Spell and a Summoning Spell. Again, the device did nothing at all. *'Cool. I am*

free of this blasted department finally.' Harry turned and approached the door wearing a large smile on his face. He checked his invisibility cloak to make sure it was covering him properly and opened the door slightly.

He saw Mafalda finishing up on rearranging her papers. She had her back to the door and Harry was sure he heard her mumbling under her breath. He slipped out of the detector room and closed the door. Moving very carefully, Harry worked his way to the front of the room and the exit that led to the auror department. Mafalda was done sorting her papers and was sitting down again. Harry looked over the barrier making sure she was far enough away in case she heard him open the door.

'Now is my chance.' Harry opened the door quickly and as silently as he could. He slipped out of the room and closed the door. Once the door was closed, Harry retreated to the door leading out to the hallway. He kept one eye out for aurors and one on Mafalda's door. When he reached the doorway to the hall, Harry saw two aurors coming into the room. He waited for them to move away from the door before he approached it.

In one quick motion, Harry opened the door and slipped through to the hallway. He turned around to look for Tonks, but didn't find her. *'Where the hell is she?'* Harry wondered if she had left or if this was part of the mission as well. Remembering that her cloak could become invisible too, he pulled off his personal cloak. With a tap of his wand and the spoken counter, Harry turned off the invisibility feature of his Unspeakable cloak.

Seconds later, another person materialized down the hall a few feet standing next to the windows. The figure moved towards him and Harry could see Tonks' face under her hood. He smiled feeling like he had accomplished something on his own. *'I did this on my own. I did this because I wanted to, sort of. This had nothing to do with Hogwarts or Dumbledore. I am free, I am really free. I am in control of my life more than ever right now.'*

Tonks smiled at Harry and when she got close enough she pulled him into a hug. Harry felt her arms encircle him and hold him to her chest. "Great job, Harry," she whispered. "Can you do magic now?"

Harry gave her one last squeeze and stepped back. He drew his wand and cast the Orchideous spell for Tonks and handed her the bouquet of flowers that it produced. He smiled widely at the grin and sigh on her face.

"Well done and thank you. Now the next part of the mission." Tonks turned around slowly, smelling her flowers the entire way to the lift. Once they were in the lift, Tonks pressed the button for level eight. "Now we go to records to let you add that sheet to your file. Oh, one more thing."

Harry was smiling and turned to Tonks when she said her last part. Harry found Tonks moving towards him and she grabbed his head with her hands. She pulled him down to her and planted a big kiss on his lips. Harry wasn't expecting it, but he couldn't find anything to complain about. She held the kiss, causing Harry to remember the last time they had kissed, until the lift chimed at a floor other than the one they wanted.

They separated quickly assuming positions in either corner of the lift as the doors opened. Harry noticed that they were on level five and Arthur Weasley stepped into lift hesitating for only a second. He gave a forced smile and nodded to both Tonks and Harry. Tonks didn't return the nod, so Harry forced himself to do the same. He watched Arthur turn and press the button for level seven.

Harry wondered what Mr. Weasley would be doing with the Magical Games and Sports department, but he tried to focus on his next mission. The lift cleared of anyone else and started moving again. Tonks reached over and grabbed Harry's shoulder.

"This should be easy and you can do what you need to do. Make me proud."

Harry nodded and stepped off the lift when the doors opened. He made his cloak invisible and put on his own cloak. He moved down the long hallway which had doors on both sides every twenty feet or

so. There were letters on each door for every letter of the alphabet. Harry sped up his pace so he could get to door 'P' and get home. The fatigue he had before was getting worse. The fight with Horace had taken a lot out of him and he knew it.

Seeing an 'N' on the door to his left, he knew that 'P' was going to be next. He walked the twenty feet and found it. He tried the doorknob, but it wouldn't open. He drew his wand and tried the Unlocking spell, but nothing happened. Not really knowing any other spells to unlock things, Harry used all his will and intent to open the door. It took him a few tries, but finally he heard the lock click open when a pinkish colored spell shot from his wand.

Harry opened the door and moved inside closing the door behind him. He lit the lamps around the room, put his cloak in his pocket, and started searching the long room for his name. There were shelves and shelves of folders inside of boxes. The shelves were along the outer wall and a set of shelves were in the middle of the room as well. The organizational method seemed to be by family name. Harry started at the end, on his right, and started looking at the labels on the boxes. 'Pwy' was the last name on the last box.

Spending the next few minutes searching and pausing at the 'Prewett' box, Harry found the box labeled 'Potter.' Harry pulled the box off the shelf and found that the outside of the box was completely clean of dust. Harry had found some boxes that had layers of dust on them meaning that the people had either done nothing worth documenting for years or the family was dead. The 'Prewett' box was covered in dust making Harry think that Molly Prewett Weasley's activities must be filed under 'Weasley.'

Once Harry had the box on the floor, he removed the top and looked inside. There were rows of miniaturized folders lined up side-by-side. Harry could see that there were a few levels worth of folders as well. Searching for a while, Harry found a section that had a small label on it marked, 'Harry James Potter, 1980.' Harry pulled out the section and set it on top of the rest of the files. He enlarged the section and opened the front of the folder. The first sheet was a certificate of live birth stating that Harry had been born on July 31th, 1980 at St. Mungo's at 12:46 P.M. to Lily and James Potter.

Harry saw the signatures of his parents on the certificate and found his eyes beginning to wet. *'I have never seen their signatures before. The map might have my dad's writing on it sometimes, but I never knew his writing was like mine.'* The spiky letters were very familiar and his mother's writing looked very much like Hermione's. *'Must be a muggle-born girl thing. Guys just don't write like that.'*

Harry wanted a copy of this certificate so he had something else of his parents or at least could see their handwriting. Harry performed the copy spell he had seen Hermione use so many times over the years. The spell was fast and it worked. The only problem he found an odd ghosting of the word, "COPY" on the sheet. *'The originals must be protected somehow from duplication.'* Looking at the rest of the box and knowing he shouldn't waste time reading through his folder, Harry skipped ahead to the back of his folder. The last thing in his folder was a sheet saying Harry had completed his fifth year of Hogwarts. He looked at the sheet right before that and found McGonagall's and Dumbledore's signature on a sheet that reinstated him to the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

'So nice of them to let me know about this.' Harry returned to the end of his folder and pulled out the emancipation form. He slid it into his folder and there was a slight glow before everything returned to normal. Harry reshrunk the folder and replaced it in the box. Harry paused before putting the lid on the box.

'Fuck it, I want this information. This is about me and my family.' Harry pulled over an empty box that was sitting at the end of the row. Harry concentrated hard and cast the duplicate spell again focusing on the entire box. After a few seconds, the empty box started filling up with miniature folders. Harry kept doing whatever it was that he was doing since it was working.

After a minute or so, the new box was full of folders just like the old one. Harry pulled out a folder labeled 'James Harry Potter, 1960.' Harry enlarged the folder, opened it, and saw that his father's certificate was there as well. Forcing himself not to read anymore, Harry reshrunk the folder and returned it to his box. He put the original back and made sure it was lined up properly like the rest of the boxes on the shelf.

Harry sealed his new box and shrunk it. He picked up the box and placed it in a pocket of his robes. Moving to the door, Harry extinguished the lamps with a wave of his wand. With a feeling of accomplishment bursting from inside, Harry opened the door and exited the room. He saw Tonks sitting on the floor leaning against the 'Q' door. She was looking right at him wearing a large smile, again.

"I am done," Harry said. "Where to now?"

"To our boss and then home. You look really tired right now."

"That is because I am. The test took a lot out of me."

Tonks smirked and stood up, but under her breath Harry heard her say, "Not as much as it did from Horace."

Harry looked at her, but she acted like she hadn't said a word. She put her arm around his waist and directed him to the lift. When they reached the lift, Tonks pressed the button then turned to Harry and starting kissing him again.

Harry was enjoying the kissing, but he didn't know what it was all about. Tonks had always been forward and he was always confused afterwards. *'I am not sure what to do, but I will keep doing what I have been since this is fun.'* Harry slid his hands around Tonks' small body and held her firmly to him as she moved slightly as she kissed him. Harry decided to try the Legilimency trick again since it had a rather interesting result the last time.

He opened his eyes a little and hesitated in kissing back causing Tonks to open her eyes slightly. Once he saw her now purple eyes, Harry willed himself into her mind. He felt like he was falling into a very soft and fluffy pillow. It was a warm sensation and he felt very safe. He started kissing her again and she reacted immediately to his ministrations. He felt heat beginning to rise inside of her. She started moving up and down against him as she kissed more intently very second.

Harry felt his body move in response to her and he had to fight down his urges. He knew they were in the Ministry and could be seen by anyone who came down the lift, but he didn't really care at the

moment. He could feel her emotions and what could only be desire raging in her. He heard a distant chime indicate the lift was on its way to pick them up. Harry let her win the tongue battle and held her close for a second before removing his mind from hers.

He looked at her and saw Tonks trying to control her breathing. She was fixing her clothes as well. Harry smiled and wondered what she was going to say if anything. The lift arrived and they entered the very empty compartment. Harry pressed button nine and the lift started moving again.

Tonks looked at him and shyly said, "You have to tell me how you do that and what you see or feel."

Deciding to be coy, Harry replied, "I will think about it."

Harry was saved from being hit by his quick actions and the doors opening at the right time allowing him to escape. Harry sprinted down the hallway as fast as he could considering his exhaustion. Tonks moved after him and watched him open the entrance to the office. They entered together and headed to Marcus's office. Tonks knocked and the door opened for them. They entered and found Marcus sitting behind his desk and Horace in one of the chairs.

"Done?" Marcus asked.

"The device was frozen and the form was added to my folder," Harry answered.

"Brilliant," Marcus said. "I look forward to more successful missions from you."

"I want you here tomorrow at seven to begin your training. Sleep well since it will be a tough day." Horace had a wicked gleam in his eyes as he stood and left the office.

"You will do fine, Harry," Marcus said. "I have no doubts about that. Now that you have everything you need, I believe you are free to go. Also, medical and Horace wanted you to take this potion tonight."

"What does it do," Harry asked not trusting anything without knowing what it was.

"It is an enhancement potion," Marcus explained. "All of the operatives have used them. It enhances your body's strength and endurance. You are in shape, don't get me wrong, but you are still on the small side. This potion will help you out in that area. Everyone reacts differently to it and its results vary. It won't hurt you if that is what you are concerned about."

"Fine, I will take it tonight. Does it work quickly?"

"It works over time," Marcus said. "After a few weeks it will run its course and you can see what you have. This is a restricted potion and only Unspeakables have access to it."

"Okay, thanks," Harry said.

"We should be going," Tonks said. "It has been a long day and I think tomorrow will be even longer."

"Quite possibly, Chamel," Marcus finished. "Good day, and welcome, Harry."

"Good bye," Harry said and followed Tonks out of the office.

Both of them tapped their cloaks and Harry saw the same small box appear from a very well concealed pocket from Tonks' cloak. Harry saw a wand appear and tap the box making it turn blue for a second. The wand was concealed again and a finger motioned Harry forward. He touched the box and waited for the tug on his navel which happened quickly.

Harry appeared in the back garden of Privet Drive and heard Tonks hit the ground with an, "Oof." Harry tapped his cloak and saw a wand do the same. Both visible now, Harry helped Tonks up. She stumbled into Harry and stayed that way for a few seconds before moving away slowly.

They approached the rear door and Harry tried to open it finding it locked. For the first time at Privet Drive, Harry pulled his wand

intending to do magic without worrying. He cast the Unlocking Charm and opened the door. He let Tonks in and closed the door locking it manually. The kitchen was spotless as usual and the house was quiet.

They moved into the hallway and up the stairs to Harry's room. Once inside, Harry removed his new and old cloak storing them appropriately. Harry pulled out his shrunken box of files causing Tonks eyes to open widely.

"Harry, what is that?" Tonks asked but it seemed she knew what it was.

"I made a copy of my Family's records. What about it?"

Shaking her head, Tonks said, "I have created a monster. It is illegal to be in possession of Ministry records, like those, without the proper requests and such. You are in big trouble, Mister." The last was said in such a way that Harry knew she was having one on him.

"Is that so, Ms. Auror? What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to punish you," Tonks was smiling in a sexy way and she was moving closer every second.

"Well, can you punish an Unspeakable?"

"Oh yes, since I am one too, I can do that. I also outrank you, but we don't get hung up on rank in our department."

Tonks pulled Harry into a kiss and he wrapped his arms around her. They kissed for awhile before falling onto the bed and relaxing. Tonks saw Harry yawn and knew he was tired.

"It is almost six and you have to get some sleep. Take your potion and go to bed. You won't need any food with that potion since it fills you up basically."

"What about you?"

"I will take care of my self, Harry. Here, drink your potion and get in bed." Tonks left the room for a second not saying where she was going.

Harry took the potion and felt it slide down his throat. He didn't know what was going to happen, but it didn't taste terrible. As Harry was removing his shirt and pants, he found that he didn't need any food. He felt very full and only wanted to sleep. He crawled into the bed and settled in to his pillow.

The bed sunk a little and a warm hand moved around him and gave him a little hug. Harry turned around and was staring into the face of the real Tonks again.

"I thought you didn't want it to become a habit of looking like yourself?"

"With you it works," Tonks said very quietly. She looked him in the eyes and kissed his nose lightly.

"I am falling asleep, Nymphadora, so I will say goodnight now." Harry leaned forward and gave Tonks a strong kiss on the lips before easing back and closing his eyes.

Tonks stared at Harry as he fell asleep. "It is Tonks, Harry," she said very quietly under breath. She sighed pleasantly and rolled over as well. She moved her back against Harry and snuggled into him. She found his arm moving to encircle her as had happened before.

'Oh, I love this part,' Tonks thought. She was pulled to his warm body and held tightly there as she, too, fell asleep thinking of how great an affect Quidditch had for certain people.

Neither saw nor heard the door open a few hours later. Neither saw nor heard the inquisitive eyes and strangled gasp. The door was closed tightly and the floorboards creaked a little as the person moved away from the room that held Harry Potter, student and Unspeakable, and Nymphadora Tonks, his guard and 'friend.'

4. Training

Tonks tried to move while asleep, but the resistance she met caused her to wake up. She immediately felt a sense of safety wash over her as her eyes opened and her brain started functioning. *'Oh this is heaven. What a way to wake up in the morning.'* She looked down and found, yet again, Harry's arms wrapped around her tightly. Her left breast was completely covered by Harry's long-fingered hand. She took a deep breath and sighed slowly enjoying the sensation.

'Anyone else would have been at my pants from the first second, but Harry just holds me and gets embarrassed when he finds himself in personal situations. I love his naivety; it is so endearing.' Tonks closed her eyes and let herself be swept up in the moment. *'He is so rare a person. I have never met someone like him before. He is as clueless as they come concerning intimacy, but there I am, completely in over my head. I tried to tease him just for fun and he kicked my arse. I tried to kiss him a little just to frustrate the poor boy and I lose all control over myself. And that thing he does, wow that is amazing. No one could withstand that. No matter how skilled they are in Occlumency, they would crumble.'*

Tonks reveled in her memories of the last two days and the feeling of warmth Harry gave off as he held her. She only stopped when she started getting too excited by her thoughts. *'I am sure he wouldn't mind being woken up that way, but I would probably scare the hell out of him by doing it.'* Her thoughts threaten to shift back to more pleasant memories, but she forced them down.

'You are the adult here whether you act like it or not. Think of what people would say; think of what the papers would do to you. "Twenty-something auror seduces The-Boy-Who-Lived." That would be a wonderful headline for mum to read over morning tea. She would be shocked at first and looking to yell at me, but she would be happy for me in the end. Dad would read it, too. He would probably yell at me and congratulate Harry. Men. Stop it! This is Harry you are thinking about and he is years younger than you. Up until now it has all been for fun. Be the adult you are supposed to be and distance yourself.'

Tonks' train of thought lasted until Harry shifted slightly and pulled her close to him. *'Oh I am fucked. A simple hug and I fall apart. I have to be strong; I have to fight it. But he is so cute and sexy and...yep, I am so fucked.'*

Tonks sighed again and didn't know what to do about Harry. She was going to spend a lot of time with him this summer guarding and training him but this was something she didn't expect. *'Why do I have to be such a flirt? Why did I have to flirt with him? It was just supposed to be fun and games. And now, now I look forward to the teasing as much as he does because it makes me feel good. Is it me or is it him?'* A very clear voice in her mind told her it was him. He was the difference.

Tonks kept arguing with herself as she tried to figure out what to do. The only options she could think of were to let things happen as they may or to completely close herself off to Harry. *'Maybe I can just see what happens. He is young and I am nothing terribly amazing so he is likely to move on to some other young hottie when he sees her.'*

Harry opened his eyes slowly and realized he was holding Tonks again. She was firmly in the grasp of both of his arms. Without moving, Harry tried to figure out where his hands were. *'Left hand is on her right hip, which is okay I guess. Right hand is...shite. Why do they always end up there? Because it is fun for some reason. Okay, is Tonks awake and will she be mad this time?'*

Harry waited a few minutes until he decided that Tonks was awake and just lying in his arms. *'Tonks' is a flirt. She told me that the first or second day she was here. Why is she still flirting with me? I am no one special. I couldn't even keep Cho around, but that wasn't entirely my fault. Some things aren't my fault. Should I ask Tonks what is going on? And say what? I like kissing you so can we do it some more? Yeah right, that would be a stupid thing to say and she would probably curse you for it too.'*

Harry didn't know what to do. He had never known what to do about the girls at school and this was no different. *'She is the adult. She knows what she is doing. I should let her make the decisions here. It is not like I have any clue what I am doing anyway. That is what I will*

do. I will follow Tonks' lead. She knows what she is doing and that is more than I know. Besides, I am having a lot of fun with her right now.'

The two stayed in Harry's bed until a vibration from Tonks' wand ended the comfortable silence. Tonks stopped her wand from vibrating and took a breath. In doing so she felt Harry's hand move with her breast.

"Harry, you need to get up. We have to be at the office in forty minutes."

"I have been awake for awhile. What are the plans for today? More tests?"

Tonks flipped over not hesitating as Harry's hand was pushed across her chest simulating her a little bit. After a deep breath, she said, "You will be tested in your knowledge, speed, and power. It will be more like a test at school though so there shouldn't be any simulations like yesterday. I will warn you that other members might be around and some of them will not like the fact that you have such high levels already. You might have to prove yourself to some of them before they start giving you the respect you deserve. I know I had to beat a few of them up before they left me alone."

"Alright, anything else I should know?"

"I had a question from yesterday. When you are casting spells with your wand, how strong is the feeling of magic?"

"I am not sure what you mean?"

"When you cast a spell you feel the magic rush out of you. What does it feel like?"

"Yesterday was the first time I had ever felt a pushing sensation or anything for that matter when using my wand. Aside from when I first got it of course."

Tonks just stared at Harry eyes. "You don't feel your magic when using it? Never? Not even when you cast your Patronus?"

Harry didn't know what to say about this comment so he went with the truth. "No, I never feel my magic when casting spells. The only time I have was when I started learning wandless magic. The only way I could get it to work right was to push the magic out of me. Yesterday, I felt the magic while using my wand because I was using the same techniques. I was forcing my intent and will into many of my spells, because I knew that I couldn't beat Horace with my limited knowledge of spells. I tried to overwhelm him with the number and strength of them and by moving a lot."

"This is another one of those times when you don't know the basic rules of magic, Harry. This is so unusual I am not sure what to do. Almost everyone feels their magic when using it. You feel it move out of you when you cast a spell. You feel yourself getting weaker when you use a lot of powerful spells. I watched your entire test, Harry. They have the ability to monitor everyone in the room. The number of spells you cast and the power you put into them would have drained most people. Your Cruciatus Curse, alone, would have drained most wizards.

"As we get older, our capability to perform magic increases a little. We get more powerful to a point, but we are able to do more spells. A student starting out might be able to cast an easy spell many times, but they will not be very powerful. A strong spell would drain the kid very quickly. Have you ever gotten tired from using magic?"

"I am not sure? I have been tired after a fight before, but I have always been injured so I don't know what caused it. When I learned the Patronus, I was tired, but I was fighting a Dementor. Really it was a Boggart but it had the same effect."

"How about during the D.A. last year? Did you ever get tired demonstrating the spells?"

"No, I only did them a few times then I walked around and helped the others."

"I am sorry, but how about one of the fights with You-Know-Who?"

“Voldemort.” Harry watched Tonks flinch. “His name is Voldemort or Tom or any insulting variation thereof. Please work on saying his name.”

“I will try, but it is something we are trained not to say.”

“Fine. The fight in the cemetery wore me out, but the Cruciatus Curse had a lot to do with that. The Imperius Curse and the Priori Incantatem made me tired too. I had a broken leg at the time so I don’t know if that mattered at all or not. The Ministry fight was nasty, but I don’t remember being that tired afterwards. I was thinking about other things at the time.”

“So you don’t remember becoming tired from using magic? I have to tell Marcus that since he wants to know anything that you can do that others can’t. This would be one of those things. I am sure Horace will want to test your magical endurance today then.”

Tonks saw Harry scowl and didn’t want him mad at her. “Today should be you casting spells at things or at the target drones. I doubt Horace is ready for another test like yesterday. You really surprised them, Harry. You are starting off really well. I am very proud of you.”

Tonks leaned forward and kissed Harry lightly on the lips. *‘Why did I do that? I just wanted to see what would happen and here I am kissing him. Oh I am so weak.’*

Harry accepted the kiss and returned it as long as Tonks maintained contact. He realized his right hand had settled on Tonks hip and was holding her steady. He looked into her eyes when she opened them. They had a dark, hungry glint to them and Harry found them entrancing. He smiled at her and waited to see what she would do. He was slightly disappointed to see her close her eyes for a few minutes. When they opened again, the entrancing look was gone and the playful Tonks look had returned.

“I should shower before we leave, Harry. You should be fine since you will probably just get sweaty today. I shouldn’t be more than a few minutes. Get yourself ready and don’t worry about food. We can eat when we get there and I can show you the kitchen.” Tonks got out of the bed and started gathering her things.

Harry watched Tonks very closely because she wasn't wearing any pants, again, and her t-shirt was shorter than the one the other day. Harry was mesmerized by the light purple, lace panties Tonks was parading around his room. He could only think that light purple was as nice a color as the blue she wore before. He watched her grab her cloak and a few things from a bag that she had under his bed. She left the room and closed his door.

Seconds later, a slight squeal made Harry grab his wand and toss on his nearest item of clothing which was his new cloak. Harry opened his door quickly and found Tonks defiantly standing in front of Petunia who was glaring daggers. Harry wasn't sure what had happened but it was his family so he would handle it.

"Tonks, I will handle this. Why don't you get ready so we can leave. Aunt Petunia, if you have something to say, say it to me."

Tonks pushed past Petunia and entered the loo closing and locking the door. Petunia stood in her place for a few seconds before she looked directly at Harry. She marched straight past him and into his room. Harry turned and followed her in. He found her standing in the corner staring at his messy bed. He waited to see if she would say anything, but after a few minutes he spoke first.

"Tonks charmed the bed larger so she had a place to sleep the first night. We left it since she is my guard. Now, what is the problem?"

Petunia looked up from the bed to Harry. She seemed to be thinking something over in her mind before opening her mouth. "I checked on you last night for the first time in years, Harry. To say the least, I was shocked by what I saw."

"And what did you see, Aunt Petunia?" Harry held his ground. According to the Ministry, he was emancipated and he could handle his own life. According to him, Petunia had given up the right to have any say in how he lived his life the day she locked him in his cupboard.

"I saw you and 'her' in your bed together. That is bad enough, but then I find her in our hallway wearing nothing but an old t-shirt and her knickers. What did you get up to last night, young man?"

Harry was astonished at the nerve of his aunt. She had never given a damn about him until now when he started living his own life. "I got up to what ever I got up to, Petunia. You have no say in it anymore. Actually, you never had any say in it. You have to act like a parent before you can be one. You have never shown me that you care in the slightest about me. Why are you starting now?"

"This is our house, Harry. You are here so you will not do things you shouldn't. Consider yourself lucky Vernon didn't find you like that. He would have been irate."

"And if he touched either one of us I would have hurt him as promised. I can use my magic now without any worries or concerns. We took care of that yesterday and now I have a job to go to as well."

"A job, you? You are too young to have a job."

"Well, I have one and there is nothing you can say about it. I am making my own choices and no one can prevent that anymore. If you wish to stop me, go ahead and try. I will do everything I can to control my own life and no one is going to stop me either."

Harry was beginning to glow again, and Petunia had moved back as far as she could into the corner. Harry was mad. He was getting worked up and his magic was starting to bleed through and become visible. *'I will not let her or these people control my life. I may just be starting out, but I am an Unspeakable, damn it. For the first time in my life, I am Harry-Fucking-Potter.'*

Petunia cowered in the corner and watched Harry's aura ripple and twist around itself. She was completely overwhelmed by the anger she saw and felt. Her nephew was everything the book had said. She realized that every bit of it was accurate. Every lethal situation she read about was true. Her sister's scrawny son had lived through so much and he was not going to stop now. For the first time in her life, she felt ashamed of herself. *'He could kill me right now. I can feel it. I can see it in his eyes. He really will do whatever he has to right now. I am sorry Lily, I failed you.'*

"I, she, Harry, she is older than you. It isn't proper for you and her to share a bed."

"You have no say in what I do or don't do in case you missed what I said earlier. To me, you are just a person who lives here. You are no one special to me. Tonks is someone special. She is helping me when no one could or would. She has done so much for me in the last three days I can't even begin to explain it. I may survive this war because of her help. I know that, because of her, I will at least have a chance at living through this. No one else can say that and I know of no one I will say that about."

Harry was glowing as his anger was still running high. He felt someone behind him, but before he did anything aggressive he heard the familiar sound of Tonks voice.

"Harry, please calm down. You are glowing again and you could hurt someone accidentally. Everything is fine. Calm down, please."

Harry took a deep breath and used what little Occlumency he had to calm down. He closed his eyes and found his magic swelling inside of him. Harry had never felt this before, but it was invigorating. He opened his eyes and saw Petunia still cowering in the corner. He turned his head and saw Tonks standing in the doorway haphazardly dressed with water running down her face. She was smiling at him, but she was hesitant nonetheless.

"What is wrong? Can't I get mad at someone?"

"Harry," Tonks tried to stay neutral but found it very hard to do so. "You are still glowing even though it is less than when you were raging at Petunia. Have you ever seen someone's aura before?" Harry shook his head. "Your aunt is completely beside herself from seeing one. I have seen them a few times in my life, but yours, just now, was more impressive and unnerving than any of the others. On that, can you feel your magic now?"

"Yes, I can. It is like a wave on Hogwarts' lake only bigger. I can feel it moving around and swirling. I have never felt like this before."

"That sounds like how most magical people describe their magic. The only difference," Harry scowled at the word difference, but Tonks forged on. "The only difference is that we liken it to a stream or a ripple. I can feel my magic all the time. Being a metamorphmagus I

am constantly in touch with my magic. I know you have at least a little of the ability, but the most intense I have felt my magic was during my final practical after auror training. I would say it felt like a stream running steadily. You call yours a wave. Think about that if you find the time, Harry."

"Now, what did you say to make Harry this mad?" Tonks asked Petunia.

Petunia stayed in her corner and stared at Harry. Tonks looked to Harry and he was almost back to normal.

"Harry, what did she say?"

"Basically, she said that you were too old for me," Harry said fuming.

"And what is that supposed to mean, Petunia?" Tonks directed her question at the woman still backed into the corner.

"You are too old for a fifteen-year-old. How old are you anyway? Twenty-five?"

"I am twenty-two-years-old thank you very much," Tonks said. "As Harry has said, it is none of your business what he does since you have never been a parent to him. I believe we should go, Harry, since we are supposed to be there at seven."

Tonks pulled her wand and dried her hair, quickly, right in the doorway. Petunia watched her but said nothing about it. Harry stared down his aunt. He wanted to do something, but he didn't know what exactly.

"Make the portkey, Tonks. I want to leave as soon as possible. I told you things wouldn't change. Petunia, get out of my room." Harry was stern in his command and he left no argument on the subject.

Petunia moved out of the corner, past Harry and Tonks, and into the hallway near her room. Harry made sure he had his things and walked out of his room. He closed the door loudly and cast a locking charm on the door using his wand. Petunia squeaked but fought it.

Harry stared at her as Tonks tapped the box again turning it into a portkey.

With a tap on his shoulder, Harry held his hand out and Tonks put the box in his hand while she held onto it as well. They both flipped their hoods up and waited for the pull on their navels taking them to the Ministry. Harry stared at his aunt and felt his anger returning. He didn't care about why, he just wanted to be mad at something and she was a perfect person for it.

The tug came and Harry found himself in the atrium of the Ministry again. He let Tonks take the box away before he stormed on his way to the lift. He didn't even pause at the guard station completely ignoring the young guard who had backed away as he approached. He hit the call button with his fist and stood waiting for the lift to arrive. Tonks caught up to him and stood right next to him in case he lost control of his magic.

The lift arrived and Tonks followed Harry onto it. The lift shuddered to life and whisked them to their destination. Harry reached the doorway first and tapped out the sequence giving his password. Once inside the department, Harry made his way to the training room.

"Didn't you want to eat first?" Tonks asked but wasn't sure it was a wise thing to do. She received no response and decided to watch how Harry handled things. She was beginning to worry because he was so mad. He had repressed a lot of anger over the years and it looked like it was coming to the surface. *'He is taking control of his life. He took control from his aunt this morning and that must have been the cause of this. I hope he doesn't get into any fights today. He will draw the others' attention enough being the new guy.'*

Harry walked to the training room and opened the door giving his password again upon request. There were a few people inside, but he wanted to get started and knew that Horace was the man to see first. He found Horace talking to another hooded man near the center of the room which was different than the day before.

On the right side, there was a firing range of sorts with dummies setup in a row. They were levitated off the ground a little and they moved from side to side in erratic patterns. Harry saw two others at

the range shooting spells at the dummies. Above the heads of the two shooters, there were two black boxes for each station. When a spell hit the two boxes would display numbers. Harry was too preoccupied to pay attention to the numbers that flashed with each spell. He walked over to Horace and waited for him to finish talking to the other Unspeakable.

Harry found his anger subsiding as he waited. He figured it was best to calm down before talking with Horace who would no doubt want to get even for the other day. Horace sending the other off to begin range practice let Harry know he was next up.

"Well, I see our Recruit is ready to begin his first day," Horace said loud enough that the others in the room turned to watch. "Think you can get lucky again, Recruit?"

"Where do I begin, Horace?" Harry wasn't going to step into that question. Horace was trying to bait him just like Snape would; only Horace would really hurt him with spells if he got the chance.

"Wise answer, Recruit. First, let's see how much you know. I will have you fire off all the curses you know and then I will see if you should know any others."

Part of the room changed into a grassy field and there were boulders in front of Harry. Horace stood next to him and instructed Harry to begin firing. Harry started off with the first curses he learned at Hogwarts. His shots were pretty accurate for where he was aiming. Horace never said a word during the demonstration. Harry cycled through all the common curses and finished with a powerful Stunner.

Harry then started working on the new spells he had read about before the D.A. and the first day he had returned for the summer. When Harry cast the bone spells, he heard Horace make a sound, but he didn't stop firing. Harry ended his demonstration with the Cruciatus Curse. He turned and looked into Horace's face waiting for the next command.

"Not bad, for a new guy, I guess," Horace was looking down his nose at Harry very similar to how his aunt would. "That is barely acceptable,

but you have a lot to learn. Now let's go over to the range and see what your numbers are there."

Harry could feel the anger returning from what happened at Privet Drive. The look Horace was using was driving it. Harry wanted to show him not to treat him like she did. Harry was going to prove to this man that he was good enough to be here whether he liked it or not.

The others at the range saw Horace coming over with Harry and stopped firing. They knew the drill and gave up the range to the trainee. Horace stepped in front of the range line and waited for Harry to take up a position on the line. A flash of a silver spell fell across the room and hit Horace in the head. He paused then smiled widely. The other Unspeakables noticed this and stepped back quickly conjuring chairs a good distance away from Harry and the range. Once Harry's feet hit the line, Horace began his instructions.

"Think you are something special, don't you? Think you got what it takes? That first test was just the admittance test. I can still boot you out if I think you are a worthless git. You have to prove to me that you have what it takes to be here every single day. Are you up for that kind of challenge?"

"Yes." Harry wasn't going to give Horace any reason to kick him out. He was going to do this and he was going to learn how to survive. He was going to learn how to keep others alive too.

"I will be the judge of that." Horace was sounding more like Snape every time he opened his mouth. Harry was getting more annoyed as time went on. "Since this is your first time, I will take it easy on you." Six targets appeared at the end of the range twenty-five yards away. Harry never saw the spectators lean back in surprise.

"This range is designed to measure your spell's power and accuracy. The further you are away from the center, the lower your score, and the more powerful your spell, the higher your score. The accuracy measurement is a simple one to figure out. It is based on distance from the core and spell selection. An area spell will score differently than a specific-target spell. Make sense, good." Horace didn't wait for Harry to respond.

“The power score is something altogether different. It is a logarithmic measure. The jump from ten to twenty is exponential and so on. Need a better explanation than that, visit a library. Normal people would score around thirty to fifty. I expect our operatives to be in the sixties and seventies. More than that, well, I doubt it will happen so I will move on.”

Harry glanced up but couldn't see the score boxes at all. When he brought his eyes back to Horace, he saw a wand pointing at him and a spell forming. Harry followed his instincts and snatched his wand from the air as he released it. The spell was flying at him now and he threw up a quick shield deflecting the attack. Harry responded by returning a Stunner.

Horace still had a smile on his face as he ducked the Stunner and watched it fly past him. Harry's spell struck a target with a slight tone echoing in the room he hadn't noticed before. The audience and Horace saw the numbers register, but Harry didn't. Horace kept his face blank, but the others made a sound when 40/72 appeared on the board. Horace barely concealed his scowl as he threw up a Silencing Dome preventing any sounds from reaching the range area.

“Pathetic, Potter, and never take your eyes off your enemy no matter what.” At Harry's startled look. Horace explained. “They can't hear us and we can't hear them. The last thing I need is you being distracted by them. You are hopeless enough as it is without more things getting in your way.” Horace got what he was looking for, a death glare from his trainee. *‘Excellent. Let's see what you got, Boy.’*

“Well, what are you waiting for an invitation? I would rather find out, quickly, how helpless you are and move on to another. So get started.” The glare only intensified and Horace saw defiance.

‘Fuck him. I will prove to this arse that I belong here. He wants spells, I will give him spells.’ Harry started firing spells at the targets. He was casting them as fast as he could too. After about a half hour, Horace stopped him.

“If that is the best you have to offer me, then leave, Boy.” Horace put extra emphasis on the word ‘Boy.’ He waited until Harry was visibly angry. Horace saw a sparkle in Harry's eyes and it was of pure hate.

'That is what I saw yesterday before you leveled me. Use it, damn it, use it.'

"You going to use that wand or just wave it around? I am right here, Potter. You want to hurt me, then hurt me." Horace sneered at Harry hoping to aggravate him further. He got his wish.

Harry fired at Bone Shattering spell at Horace followed by the Breaking one. Horace had been slowly moving back towards the targets to give him enough distance to escape getting hit should Harry actually attack him. The targets were struck and the scores registered, 45/78, 51/81.

"Weak, Boy, weak." Horace enjoyed his job. He was paid to annoy people and teach them to use their magic to their fullest extent. He watched as Harry continued to fire curses. Horace could only spare a split second to look at the scores or he risked getting hit by a nasty curse that had quite a bit of power behind it. He saw a twisting red curse flying his way and he dove to the floor knowing how bad that one would have hurt.

The audience watched Horace antagonize the Recruit. They had all been through it and knew that he would use anything he could to get the best out of them. They watched as the Recruit lowered his body into a fighting stance and one comment started the assault. They were all prepared to joke and ridicule the new guy for being pathetic. Everyone started off low in the beginning. They had figured the 72 was a fluke, but as the spells started flying and Horace started moving quickly they knew this was new guy was not a fluke. The high 60's and low 70's gave way to low 80's within a few spells.

They could see Horace still egging on the new guy and he wasn't tiring. The first guy said, "How the hell is he keeping up? He has been tossing spells for forty minutes straight." Another commented, "Not sure, but Horace is getting a workout. I know I could barely get him to move my first day."

'That was close,' Horace thought as he picked himself up from a dive. *'This kid's a natural, and I will make him better. Time for the clincher. I may have to duck out and let him go at the sim for my own safety.'*

“So, you have a little bit of fight in you, eh? Is this the same kind of fight your father put up when he was slaughtered like a sick animal?”

Horace watched as the fading look of hate intensified and Harry started giving off a dangerous feel. “Did you hear your mother scream, Potter?” Horace almost dove out of the way when Harry twitched. *‘I am stabbing a dragon in the eye while I am standing in front of it.’*

Harry heard the words Horace was saying to him. Harry could only stand there and get angrier. He had heard similar things over the years from various people so this wasn’t that bad. The only difference was that Harry had felt his magic now, and he wanted to feel it again. He wanted the feeling and getting mad was one way to get there. He was searching for the swirling sensation when Horace said something that caused Harry to snap.

“Got your own Godfather killed by your own stupidity. Maybe Tonks will be next. You think?”

Harry could feel his magic and it wanted out. It wanted to hurt someone and it wanted it badly. *‘Sirius, was not my fault. I am not going to let Tonks get hurt. No one else close to me will be hurt.’* Harry heard his mother dying and saw Ginny lying in the Chamber. He saw Hermione getting hit by that spell in the Department. The magic swelled up and needed an outlet. Harry gave it one, Horace.

Harry fired spell after spell at Horace. He dove and moved a few times, but soon a barrier grew up from the ground and Horace dove behind it. He popped up and moved around the range area with renewed vigor. Harry followed him with his wand trying to bring him down with every spell. He poured every ounce of magic he could into every spell he fired. He wanted him to hurt. The Reductor Curses struck the targets leaving scorch marks.

Harry didn’t stay at the firing line for more than a few curses before he started advancing on Horace’s position. Horace moved away and things kept appearing from the floor as cover. *‘Bastard is using the room to protect himself.’* Harry continued to move after Horace and destroy anything that got in his way.

The audience watched as Horace kept talking and the Recruit seemed to get angrier. They knew it was Horace's way. He forced you to wear yourself out the first day. You would be completely exhausted by lunch and then he would start teaching you spells and techniques.

They were waiting for that moment when Horace would get the Recruit to lose it. They always did in the end. Horace and Marcus did their research learning every bit of information they could on someone. They needed to know which buttons to push to get the most out of their people. A good leader knows the limits of the people under him so they know whether or not a goal is achievable.

The smiles grew as Horace continued his verbal assault until the Recruit hit his limit. The visible aura appeared and they all leaned back in their chairs. "Mother fucker," said one. "Have you seen one that bright before?" asked another. All three watched for a moment as the spells starting flying again. The scores were popping up so quickly that one of the Unspeakables activated the memory function creating an ever growing list of scores; 55/84, 44/86, 72/83, 75/88, 67/86, 66/89, 50/91.

"Merlin, a 90. Who the hell is that guy?" Asked the first. "Ten galleons that he collapses after five minutes. You can't keep a visible aura up that long," said the third. "Six minutes," replied the first. "Seven," said the second.

"I will take that bet, but he will keep firing spells and have the aura for at least ten minutes. My guess is that he can make it until lunch without burning out, too," voiced a newcomer to the group.

"You that confident, Chamel?" Questioned the third.

"Yes I am, Miguel."

"Bets are placed, any others?" Announced Miguel.

"I will say eight minutes." Horace made his presence known. He looked very tired and disheveled.

"Using the sim on the first day? Sure you aren't getting too old for this, Horace?" Asked the first guy.

"If you want to jump in there, Bitton, go right ahead," Horace said watching the numbers scroll up. "I thought you were joking about the aura, Chamel, but I see that you weren't. Every time he gets really mad?"

"Every time since he started working on wandless magic. He said that he had never felt his magic before that." Tonks was watching with a big smile on her face.

"Wandless, huh? I knew he had used a few things during the first test, but it wasn't that extensive. How many spells is he proficient in?" Horace asked.

"He told me he had learned eight so far, and he learned with no props. He just did it and there you go," she said waving her arm at Harry who was still firing spells at the sim that was moving around the range.

"Good, how long has he been working on them?" Horace asked generally interested.

"It took him one day to learn those and he had never thought of doing wandless magic before that," Tonks said simply ignoring how the others turned to stare at her.

"You picked a good one in him, Chamel. I have counted five spells that broke 90 so far and he is still going strong. I have the sim taunting him to keep him motivated. I want to see how long he can go. I think you only lasted five minutes during this exercise."

"He will last far longer than I did," Chamel said calmly. "I have felt his magic when he was working on his wandless skills. It was, overwhelming. He has never tried to do these things with his magic before. The aura, wandless magic, working himself to his full potential; none of it has ever occurred to him. He has always done what needed done and his magic has let him do that without much thought. If I really make him mad in the future, I am getting away fast."

At that moment, Harry fired a Cruciatus Curse at the sim and it hit. A score of 98/87 appeared on the board. "Fuck. Well that ends that exercise since 'I' am now a pathetic, quivering mass of meat. Kid is good, but I can't tell him that yet." Horace strode to the range area and slipped behind a barrier that had appeared.

Harry had been firing spells forever and Horace was always avoiding them at the last second. *'Why can't I hit him? I will make you pay you bastard.'* Harry tried to increase his firing rate and his aim, but no matter what he did, Horace was able to out maneuver him. Harry cast back to back Crucio's and the second one landed and Horace went down hard.

Harry held him under the curse until he saw movement to his left. He released the spell, spun, and fired the Bone Shattering curse. He had gotten quite good at that one today since it was one he knew Horace had felt and didn't like. The new target dodged and held his hands up. Harry then realized that it was Horace, another one. Harry looked where his Horace had been and there was nothing left.

"Settle yourself, Recruit. That was the second test and I wanted to see what you have got and where I could take you. You aren't too bad, but you could use a lot of work. Your aim is basic and your power is variable. You need to work on consistency in both areas. Your spell selection is limited so you need to learn many more. Also, expand your wandless abilities for Merlin's sake. Learn some defensive spells first since they are great for wandless casting. Offensive spells should be next followed by the helper spells like concealment and manipulation ones."

Harry was still mad, but he was kind of weary. "So you weren't even in here?"

"I was for a while, but when you started glowing and trying to kill me; I took my leave. A smart man will fight the fights he can win. He will leave the losing battles leaving the fools to die. Only fight if you have something to gain. Fighting to fight is a waste of time and risking yourself just to do so is inane. Think, choose your battles, choose your enemies, choose your location; always be in control of the fight.

Never let another control it. Never let another have an advantage over you if you can remove it.

"We are the smart fighters. We do not go blindly into a situation and just wing it. That is how people get killed who we want to live. I know you can improvise and survive but not everyone has that ability. Our operatives must think of the big picture and remember the objectives at all times. We do not settle debts here unless that is the mission. You achieve the goals and get out. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Harry choked out. He was still calming down from his fury, but the words made sense to him. *'The disaster happened here because I wasn't thinking about my friends. I was only thinking about Sirius. I lost him because there was no plan. Hermione tried to tell me that but I wouldn't listen. I have so much to learn.'*

"Now that you have calmed down, I am going to draw my wand and adjust your badge." Horace drew his wand and tapped Harry's chest revealing the badge. When it appeared, Horace mumbled a few words and started moving his wand around on it. Harry waited until he was done and looked at it.

He saw five red bars, four blue, six green, no yellows still, two purple, and four blacks. Harry felt happy for the first time since the very early morning. He must have shown something during this test to get the added bars. He still remembered what Horace had said to him, but the more he thought about it the more sense it made. *'He knows that getting me mad improves my magic. That must have been his goal the whole time. He just wanted to see what I could do and he did that.'*

"You work on your knowledge, accuracy, and shields and I can guarantee you will get more bars. If you can keep using that much power with every spell you cast, I might leave you alone about being so pathetically weak. I might even say you are acceptable, but we ain't there yet, Boy." Horace watched as Harry's smile dropped from his face and look of grim determination replaced it. *'That is what I want. Determination is the key to our job. Oh, you will be fun to teach.'*

“I think you should go to lunch and take Chamel with you. I don’t want you passing out on me later today from exhaustion.”

Harry nodded curtly and walked off the range which had returned to normal. He walked up to Tonks, who was collecting galleons by the handful from the other Unspeakables. He waited until she looked at him. He could see her smile under the mask of her hood. She was beaming. She pulled out her wand slowly and tapped his badge.

“Four more bars, Merlin, not bad for your first day. My guess is you are hungry after all that.” Tonks resumed dropping galleons into her money pouch.

“Yes, I am hungry. Where do we go to eat?” Harry wanted a break from the training room atmosphere.

“We have two choices, our own kitchen, or the Ministry cafeteria. You choose.”

“I would like a break from here, so let’s go to the Ministry one.”

“Alright, follow me.” They walked out of the training room and into the hallway leading out of the Department. Harry followed Tonks and kept trying to relax his mind from the morning’s activities. She called the lift and it arrived quickly for once. They boarded the lift and Tonks pressed the button for the Atrium. Harry managed to settle himself as the lift doors opened up to the bustling Atrium. People in all sorts of clothing were running back and forth from the lifts and through the guard station.

A few groups of wizards were moving as one through the hordes of people. Harry saw one or two people he had seen before but couldn’t name. He moved out of the lift following Tonks and they turned walking to the far back wall from the lifts. Harry saw a set of doors standing closed and wondered what was behind them. He found out when Tonks pushed the doors open and entered the large room behind them.

Harry saw tables lined up with numerous chairs surrounding them. He could only compare it to the Great Hall in its appearance minus the beautiful ceiling. People were moving about from the tables to the

sides of the room. Harry saw many pots and serving dishes along the left wall. Every now and then a dish would disappear only to be replaced by another reappearing in its place. Harry watched the witches and wizards move in a line down the length of the wall to a few stations at the end. He could hear money changing hands in the distance.

Tonks tapped him on the shoulder and he followed her to the end of the line. A couple people who had been trying to get into the line readily moved aside for the two cloaked Unspeakables. Harry watched as they hesitantly took places behind them. Harry wasn't sure he liked the way people reacted to him, but it was far better than everyone gawking and pointing at him and his scar.

He said nothing and kept close to Tonks since he didn't know what to do. Tonks grabbed a tray from the pile and added a bowl and plate along with utensils and a goblet. Harry copied the actions and proceeded down the row of awaiting food. He selected a piece of steak and kidney pie, rolls, a spot of potatoes, treacle tart, and pumpkin juice.

When he reached the end of the line, Harry followed Tonks past the pay-stand and into the general populace. Harry heard someone behind him say that they hadn't paid, but another voice told him to shut up and that Unspeakables didn't pay for food in the Ministry.

They found a table in the corner that was mostly empty and they sat down on the same side keeping their backs to the wall so they could watch the room. Tonks started in on her food and gave Harry odd smiles now and then. He began eating as fast as he could because his stomach was growling loudly. The minutes ticked by and Harry was finishing his dessert. Tonks had picked out less food so she had finished earlier and sat watching the room and the people including Harry.

"Having fun so far?" She asked cheekily.

"Right, and would you be having fun trying to kill your teacher?"

"Depends on the teacher, actually. You weren't really trying to kill him were you?"

“Not exactly, but I am not sure what I was trying to do. I wanted to hurt him that is for sure.”

“Every single one of us has wanted to hurt Horace at some point or another. That is his training style. He gets you good and mad and then he starts being mean. He usually activates the sim before the Killing Curse starts flying though. He is a good judge of people and what they are going to do. If you ever surprise him during training, you will win points with him. He likes to be surprised because it means you are better than he expected and he gets that much better at reading people.”

“How did he know what to say to get me so mad?”

“They study every single person they accept. They know everything they can find out. They interview people about you and learn who you are.”

“You mean they have asked people about me?”

“Of course, that is just the right way to do things. Don’t worry though, they Obliviate who they interview. No one remembers them asking any questions about you.”

“Who would they ask?”

“Friends, relatives, common acquaintances, those kinds of people.”

“Hermione, Ron, the other Weasleys?”

“Those would be the ones. They asked me too, but since I am your sponsor I wasn’t Obliviated. Don’t worry, it is standard procedure and they keep all their other memories. We are professionals you know. We do this kind of thing all the time. Now you should relax more before we go back. I am not sure what he has planned for the rest of the day.”

Harry slouched in his chair and watched the people move about their lunch hour. He saw Mr. Weasley getting up from a seat and walking to the exit with his partner, Perkins. Harry saw a few aurors that he

recognized from various encounters. He saw a few Wizengamot members speaking with other witches and wizards.

He closed his eyes for a few minutes assessing the day thus far. He had shown what spells he could cast and he tried to kill his teacher. *'Not a bad day, considering. Maybe the afternoon will be better since it couldn't be much worse than the morning. I am taking control of my life. Information will come as people realize I need it or I make them tell me. I am staying alive, but I need to learn more and how to keep others safe as well as protect my mind. I can not fail. I can not lose. If I am the only one who can do this, then I am the only who can. I have the opportunity to do it and I must.'*

Harry felt Tonks shift in her seat so he opened his eyes seeing a group of five approaching them. Tonks smoothly drew her wand from her cloak. So following her lead, Harry did the same. The group consisted of aurors and the leader was a large, burly man with a wiry mustache and bushy hair. Harry would describe him as a mountain man if asked to. The others were normal looking men and women with few distinguishable characteristics.

Tonks stared the man down as he approached their table. "What have we got here, a few lost 'mutes' from the basement? Lose your way or just slumming it with the common folk?" He boomed loudly drawing the attention of many people in the room.

Not missing a beat, Tonks answered in a loud voice. "Now that you are here, we have the slums and common folk all rolled into one. You never were a smart one, Brack, so why don't you take your group and leave before we cause a scene."

"Feisty aren't 'cha," Brack announced. "Maybe you would like a turn with Brack before you crawl back into your hole."

Tonks scoffed, but Harry answered the challenge first. "Leave and take your lackeys with you." Harry kept his eyes on Brack waiting for him to do something.

"Keep your dog on its leash, bitch, or it might get hit," Brack replied.

"You will apologize to her or I will make you," Harry said standing up moving his chair backwards with his foot. He kept his wand hidden but prepared to strike.

Brack watched the slim Unspeakable stand and make his threat. "Am I supposed to be scared? You are a titchy fucker aren't you? Why don't you run along before you get hurt."

"I won't be the one getting hurt," Harry stated plainly. "Apologize or I will make you."

Tonks stood as well and revealed her wand to the group. "Julian, Bree, Michaels, and, Morris is it? Why don't you all leave. This isn't a place for moderately intelligent people right now." By using their names, Tonks had captured their attention and a few looked to be seriously considering leaving Brack on his own. "Brack, I suggest you do as asked and leave. I have seen him do things you could only hope to achieve."

"Fucking you couldn't be that hard to..."

Brack never finished his sentence. Harry struck him with a Bone Breaking spell. Brack's right leg snapped and he fell to the ground making a lot of noise and scattering a few chairs in the process. The other aurors went for their wands, but Harry had already Summoned them into a nice little pile on his table.

Harry moved around the table and waved the friends away who complied instantly. Harry lowered himself to eye level with Brack who was trying to stop himself from screaming out. Harry stared him down watching his face. "Apologize."

Brack looked to Tonks and back to Harry. Chokingly, he said, "I'm sorry."

Harry watched him for a bit before standing up and turning for the door. Tonks came up along side him but said nothing. They left through the double doors being watched by everyone in the room. Harry continued to the lift and rapped the button. They entered the lift and descended to their level.

Harry broke the silence first. "Is that the kind of thing you have had to deal with here? Is that what you meant by having to work hard to get respect? Are they all like that?"

"No, just a few here and there. It is the same everywhere you go. There are always a few pillocks in every bunch. No worries. Yet again, you are my hero." Tonks said taking the mickey out of Harry.

"Very funny, Chamel. What else could I have done, honestly?"

"Let me handle it and be done with it. It wasn't that big of a deal. I have dealt with that idiot a few times already. But, to be honest, I have never dropped him like you did. That was really funny to watch. I'll have to be careful where I take you. There are some places that you would be cursing every person who talked to me and that would make for a noisy evening."

"I did what I felt I had to. I take care of my friends." Harry remained quiet the rest of the way back to the Department and into the training room.

Tonks entered the training room followed by Harry. They settled over near the range. Bitton and Miguel were with the other Unspeakable that had been present earlier. Another person had arrived while they were gone and he greeted Tonks in a friendly way.

"Chamel, I heard you had brought someone in. Is this him?"

"Yes, Cal, this is my Recruit," Tonks answered. "This is Cal, my teammate. We have been on team together for almost two years now."

"Hello, Cal," Harry said. "Pleasure to meet you."

"Why thank you, new guy," Cal said happily. "You need a name and fast. New guy and Recruit suck for names. Now, let me just see where you are on your first day, if you don't mind of course." Cal drew his wand slowly and tapped Harry's badge. He stared and said nothing for a few minutes. He seemed to be thinking about something before he continued. "Well, that explains that then doesn't it?"

“Explains what?” Harry asked truly confused. He saw the other people looking at his badge and they weren’t saying anything. “What is going on?”

Tonks moved forward and put her hand on Harry’s shoulder. “They are just getting ahead of themselves is all. Don’t worry about it. Cal is the healer for my team and he has a few other specialties making him useful on a mission.”

Cal tapped his badge and Harry saw he had three red, four blue, three green, six yellow, four purple, and two black. “He is a support person. Mostly he stays back and observes the mission. He gives us intel and obviously he has the healing thing down. He makes a fair sharpshooter too, but he needs time to get into it. In a fast moving fight, he mostly just keeps their heads down don’t cha’ Cal.” Tonks finished with a big smile and a twist to her words.

“Yes, Chamel, that about sums up my role for the team. Yours would be the not so quiet person who can fight and defend and fool everyone. Sound about right?” Cal returned.

“Fair summation, if you are into things like that,” Tonks replied waving off the backhanded insult.

Harry watched their interactions and knew they had worked together for awhile. He, Ron, and Hermione could probably have played off each other like that if they were asked similar questions. Harry spent the next few minutes watching all of the veteran members trade insults. Harry saw a lot of familiar qualities from the Gryffindor Quidditch Team in these people. They each had their own specific areas they were good at, but they were a team first and foremost.

Up in the observation booth, two people were having a very private meeting obscured amongst the shadows being cast by the lighting from the training room.

“Well, how did it go?” Asked Marcus.

“What part?” Queried Horace.

“The lunchroom first.”

“As you expected, he dropped the fool with one spell. I owe you another bottle now. This kid is going to bankrupt me, you know that?” Horace whined.

“I learned from others mistakes, Horace. I will never bet against him. That should be the lesson we learn from him. He will always come out ahead when he has too. I don’t think he even knows how to lose to be honest. Did Brack receive proper medical treatment?”

“More or less, but that is why we sent him wasn’t it?” Horace offered. “He has been an arse of an auror for years always looking for a fight with one of us. You knew he would find them and start something. You also knew he had little respect for women. Did you hope Chamel would handle him or was it Potter you were testing?”

“Horace, I had to test something before went with my gut instinct. I was right to do so. Harry will defend Chamel without hesitation. We know from our interviews with his friends that he will do what he must to protect others especially his friends. He led five others into our own department trying to save Black. He knew Voldemort would be there and yet he went anyway. Could you say that about any of our people? How many would follow our orders if Voldemort was the target? I can think of none. Even going after the inner circle would be a massive undertaking in terms of training and planning.

“He brought five school kids into this Ministry, such as it is, against twelve Death Eaters, the highest ranking members of Voldemort’s inner circle, and with a little help captured all but one of them. He dueled with Bellatrix and Voldemort. Our teams don’t plan, they do. I think there is only one place for him and you know where that is.”

“Yes, but he is new and it will be hard for him to gain the respect he needs for the position.”

“Ah, Horace, there isn’t a more accommodating team than Three. He already has Chamel’s respect that is obvious by her words and actions. You know Cal is as easy-going as can be.”

Over the speaker, they heard Cal’s comment saying, “That explains that.”

“See what I mean, he already knows what is going on and he would have been the only problem we would have.” Marcus said.

“So that issue is settled, but he has a long way to go before he will be ready,” Horace pointed out.

“Just how long a way does he have to go?” Marcus asked. “I have never seen you duck out of a second test so early. The numbers he was putting up were impressive to say the least. I spent my lunch hour reviewing them.”

“As did I, but you saw his effing aura. I would have been a fool to stay in there and cross wands with him. One of his Bone Shatterers to the head and I would have been a goner. No magic can unscramble your brains from that. I saved myself as anyone should. He knows so few spells, so he is just too limited to use right now. Besides, he knows no healing spells, his Stealth is limited to a silencing spell albeit wandless, and he knows so few shield spells that an experienced dueler could figure him out in a few spells. We need to work on his Unforgivables too. He is too good with the Cruciatus not to know the others.”

“So, your plan for the rest of the week is what?”

“Shields first so I can sleep better at night. Then transportation since he knows none at all. Maybe a few common healing spells for kicks and a little work on stealth. I want to perfect his Unforgivables before I send him out though. He has too much promise with those. He needs to be quicker with his motivation though. You have to rile him up so much to get it to be effective. You saw his first spells, 60s, 70s, and a few 80s. Then he gets really mad and they are 80s and 90s. I need to teach him to harness that power and not let it go to waste being a nightlight. Like he needs more attention brought on him in a fight by glowing.”

“You know how to do this, Horace, you will not fail.”

“I will be perfectly candid, Marcus, off the record of course. He has more potential than I have ever seen before. I can teach him to rival Dumbledore in a few years, if he is willing and has the inner strength to persevere. I love a challenge, but this one could blow up in our

faces if I make a mistake. Are we willing to risk that? Is Potter strong enough to handle everything we could give him?"

"I have no firm answer but something tells me that there is more to Harry than even we know."

"I hope you are right, Marcus, I really do. I should get out there and teach that boy how to protect himself using more than Protego and running around. Think of him taking spell after spell from those idiots and tossing them back at them. A teacher's dream."

Horace turned and left the room heading back to the training room. Marcus settled in for a good show.

Harry stayed quiet as the others bantered back and forth extolling the virtues of their teams and dogging the others. Horace walked up and sent everyone but Chamel and Harry away.

"Well, now that you have eaten and released a little 'tension', I think I should teach you some shield spells. Protego is basic and quite weak as far shields go. So we will start there and move on. I want you to get them down wanded as well as wandlessly since you have a gift for the skill. Get your book out and note the words and so on as I tell you."

The right corner of the room, on the same wall as the door and behind the range, altered to a classroom setting with a chalkboard, desk, and chair. Harry followed Horace over to the area and sat down at the desk. He pulled out his shrunken trunk, enlarged it, took out his journal and quill, and returned the trunk to its proper location and size.

"Protego, simple shield that some can't cast. Got that? Good. Fortis Aegis, more difficult to cast and harder to maintain. This one works on all the same spells as Protego and more. Motion is as such," Horace pointed to the downward spiral motion of the diagram. "Next is a favorite of mine, Absolvo Ancile. I love this spell because it is very effective and it covers the entire body. This one is perfect for an ambush or a fire fight that got out of control. The wand motion matters little as the mind mostly casts this spell. And lastly is Imprimis Patrocinor. Very sturdy shield, but it is localized to a certain area on the person. I believe you saw this in the Atrium towards the end of the

fighting. The caster lends a color to all but the Protego and Fortis Aegis shields. Those are gold and silver in color by nature. Got that down so we can get to the real work?"

Harry scribbled down everything that was written on the board and said by Horace. When he finished, he looked up at Horace who was watching him expectantly. Horace let out a grunt of disapproval and started walking over to the range. Harry followed him while he reviewed his notes.

"Now I get to see if you can learn anything instead of just using what you already have down. Well, let's get to it." Horace scowled at Harry waiting to be impressed.

Harry focused on the words and wand action mimicking what he had written down. He said the words, "Fortis Aegis," and copied the wand movements. A slight silver shield snapped into being. Harry stared at it pleased with himself that he had cast the shield on the first try. The silver had very small ripples in it moving very slowly over the surface.

"If you are quite done gawking," Horace grated as he drew his wand and threw a Stunner at Harry's shield causing it to collapse instantly. "I might get you to create a real Fortis shield, but that was a pathetic effort all around." Horace smiled as his insult caused all wonder to fade from Harry's face. "You do the magic and I will let you know if you have cause to wonder at it. Again and make it good!"

Harry felt the anger rising in him. He wanted to attack, not shield, so he wasn't sure what to do. He was feeling his magic more today since his fight with Horace or whatever it was on the range. He tried to redirect that feeling, that being, in him to create a shield. Harry said the words and did the wand motion again. This time he only stared at Horace when the silver shield appeared.

Horace wore a vacant expression on his face as the shield appeared and remained. He examined it closely and found the ripples were very small and moving rapidly over the surface. *'Second time and he gets it. This kid is lucky, good, or both. Now to see what he can really do.'*

“Respectable, but do it wandless and wordless now. That will be the key in battle, bringing this up with a thought while you fire a curse at the stupid bastard who attacked you. Get a move on, Recruit.”

Horace watched Harry make a few attempts at creating the shield. Each one was better than the last, but after four attempts none were stable enough to stop more than one spell.

“Are you damaged in the head, Recruit? You have two more of these to learn today and then I have a few more things for you before I release you. Get this right, now, or I will start cursing you until you do.”

He saw Harry’s eyes narrow and a fire erupted in them. *‘There we go, now get it right this time and we can move on.’* Harry made two more attempts each was an improvement over the last. Horace scowled at Harry as he began his seventh attempt. *‘I will have to back up what I said if he fails this time. He can go longer than I can in a fight. Get it right, damn it.’*

Horace watched as the shield sprang into existence. He felt a wash of magic as it appeared. *‘Holy, Merlin! He just forces the spells to work. Oh, he will be a force to be reckoned with once he learns to control all that.’*

Horace examined the shield closely before commenting, “Passable, I guess. Work on that one tonight. I want it up on the first try or you and I will have words tomorrow.” He saw the comment raise Harry’s ire that much more. *‘He is so easy to work up. At least he can use it when he needs to otherwise he would be hopeless.’*

“Now we move onto Absolvo Ancile. Same as before but try and get it faster we are running out of time here.” Harry cast the shield properly on the third try with his wand, creating a whitish dome around his body that was mostly transparent, and moved on to the wandless attempts at Horace’s unforgiving direction. He felt as much as watched Harry pull up the shield a few times. On the third time Harry had the shield correct, but Horace wasn’t letting him off that easily. With a scowl, Harry tried again and Horace realized, first hand, what Chamel had meant by Harry’s magic being overwhelming. His senses were flooded by the effort Harry was putting forth.

Harry held the Absolvo Shield after his fourth try. He watched Horace examine it with another scowl. *'It is the same as last time you great git. What are you doing here other than yelling at me? You are getting closer and closer to Snape in my book, arse. This is good enough so let's move on, eh.'*

"I guess that passes, Recruit, but work on that one as well. Will you ever get this right on the first try?"

'Fuck you very much.' Harry was beginning to lose all the patience he had managed to build up over lunch which was a long time ago as far as he was concerned.

"Now you get to try the Imprimis Patrocinor shield if you can manage it. Judging by your last attempts, I would say that you have about a twenty percent chance of getting this in the next ten minutes. I am keeping track of the time, go!"

Harry reached out and seized his magic as he was slowly learning to do. All the magical exercises had allowed him to feel his magic with a greater intensity and precision. He wasn't sure how to do it consistently, but he knew it was there and he could usually find it when he had to. Now was one of those times he had to find it and use it.

Focusing on his will and intent, just like when practicing wandless magic, Harry grabbed a little of his magic and pushed it out of himself and willed it to form the Imprimis Shield. A ghost of a cloud appeared on his left arm made up of a swirling metallic-blue mist. The mist held its form, but it wasn't right according to Horace. *'Go figure.'*

Harry tried again only he forced more of his magic out. The shield was larger, but the mist was the same consistency. *'Bugger this is hard. Let's try thinking something different. Remember Tom's shield, now create one just like it.'*

Harry willed himself to picture the shield on his arm as it was supposed to be. He focused and pushed with all his might to create the shield. He was very happy and relieved when the metallic-blue shield appeared on his arm and was solid to the touch. Harry found that creating the shield was a lot harder than keeping it up. Of all the

shields he learned today, this one was the easy to maintain and use in a fight. Harry moved his arm around testing how it moved with him and what it would do to his fighting technique of which he had none.

With a sigh, Horace made his inevitable comment. "Fine, fine, now can you do it wandlessly? There is nothing more frustrating than your opponent putting up a high level shield around his body and another one on his arm at the same time. You still have four minutes to get this done properly."

With a grin and a smirk of determination, Harry put his wand away yet again. He followed the same steps as before focusing and pushing and grabbing and willing everything to happen. After the first failed attempt, Harry noticed Horace moving away. Harry kept working on the shield because he had a feeling he would need it shortly. On the second failed attempt, Harry noticed Horace draw his wand while trying to hide his hands.

The third attempt didn't happen like the others. Horace waited for Harry to shift his focus before he attacked. Harry had the feeling of danger and he looked for Horace who he found off to his right. Without thinking, Harry pushed the shield up deflecting the Cutting Curse and throwing a Reductor Curse at Horace forcing him to the floor. The whole exchange took less than a second and the other members who had been sort of watching Harry's lesson stared dumbfounded at the exchange of magic.

"Bloody hell, he is fast. Where is his wand? Did you guys see his wand at all?" Bitton asked.

"Oh, I like him already," Cal said smiling. "My new team member, he is. You watch."

"Not bad, but you should be able to do that without being attacked," Horace scolded. "You will never get seven greens until you can do this consistently. And work on your accuracy too." Horace looked at his watch and laughed. "You would have had it in the allotted time, but I had to help you so it doesn't count."

'Help, my arse you bastard. Now what torture do you have in mind, you psychopath.'

"I need you to know some form of transportation that you can do on your own. Without that, you would have to depend on someone or something else to move about. What forms of travel are you familiar with?"

"Knight Bus, portkeys, floo, apparating, broom, carpet, Goblin cart. Those what you looking for?"

"Getting tired, Recruit? You are getting a little curt with your words."

"I am fine. What spells am I going to learn next?" Harry did his best to calm himself before saying something else potentially aggravating to Horace.

"Not so sure on the learning part, but we will give it a shot. Let's start with a favorite of the Ministry, the portkey. Simple to learn and cast but harder to aim your destination accurately. The spell has multiple parts; the incantation itself, the destination, the activation method, and whether or not it will be a return portkey. Any wards between you and the destination cause...well let's not worry about that until it becomes a problem."

Horace pulled a metal ring out of his pocket and tossed it to Harry. "Notes are thus. You point your wand at the item to be enchanted. You say 'Portus' while focusing on the exact location of where you want the portkey to take the traveler. It is the same process as apparating only you are using an item to move the person. Once you have the destination in your mind, you must select an activation method such as touch, timed, or number of occupants. The last thing you focus on is the return trip. Basically, you set another destination after all the rest.

"Most people focus on the mechanics first then say the spell, but whatever works for you, if it does. You ever Apparate before?"

"No, never."

"Always climbing uphill you are," Horace said while shaking his head. "No matter, if you get this down, Apparation will be easy. So, here is the process for creating a portkey. You must focus on the destination using either coordinates or specific landmarks. Everyone is a little

different in how they direct their portkeys, but the principle is the same. The key is being exact and precise. If you stuff this up, the person will end up somewhere other than the one you want. You better hope they don't end up in a wall or tree or another person for that matter.

"After you have chosen the exact location, you mentally focus on the activation type. You must keep the destination in your mind as well or it all falls apart. Finally if you want it to be a two-way portkey, you must focus on the return coordinates or location. If you can cast these shields wandlessly, then you can handle creating a portkey. Practice with that ring while I go do something constructive. Oh, and don't worry about appearing inside the walls here. This room is charmed to keep you in one piece. It can redirect portkeys to a specific location if they are out of bounds. I turned that on for you since you have yet to prove yourself right out of the gate. Let me know if or when you get it right."

Horace walked off without looking back at all. He went up to the observation booth and found Marcus and Chamel sitting together and talking quietly. Chamel didn't look very happy, but she was putting up a fight about something. Marcus finished his point and turned to Horace.

"Well, I see you aren't sparing the rod on this one. Do you have a particular reason for that, Horace?"

"Course I do. His entire life he has had constant verbal abuse and look where it got him. Tell him he can't do something in an infuriating way and he will do it just to prove you wrong. He has lived with confrontation since he can remember and that is where he shines. If you have any doubts, I suggest you challenge him to a fight only duck when he fires those bone spells at you. Fucking hurt they do. He has had enough broken bones to know how to make those spells really nasty.

"He succeeds where others fail because that has been the only way he has known. It is a way of life for him. Look where he is with those shields and tell me he can't do something if properly motivated."

“My, my, Horace,” Marcus chided. “I do say that you are getting rather attached to the new recruit. I haven’t seen you this worked up in years.”

“Oh shut up you tosser. I am only doing my job and he makes it worthwhile. I know that great arse of a potion’s teacher was mean to him, but the boy’s temperament isn’t conducive to making stew. He is a fighter, plain and simple. His anger can drive his magic to limits others could only hope for. I need to get him to a point where he can protect himself and move around. Then, I can teach him to control his anger so it isn’t controlling him.

“Right now, he could blast a hole through you and keep going. Problem is he will be blinded to everything but his enemies. He has tunnel vision when relying on his anger. I need to get him to balance himself more. Also, he is not efficient with his magic at all. He was putting so much force into his spells I wonder how he can stay on his feet at the end of the day.”

“You see what I meant by it being overwhelming?” Tonks interjected. “It is amazing.”

“And on that subject,” Marcus began. “I must question your intentions, Chamel.”

“My intentions are no concern of yours, Marcus.” Tonks crossed her arms staring down the head of her department.

“They are not specifically, but the results could be,” Marcus posed. “He has protected you a few times so far, am I correct? He has come to your defense?”

“Yes, but that is who he is. He doesn’t think about it; he just does it.” Tonks was trying to control her anger about being talked to like a little girl.

Marcus lowered his head and sighed. “My concern is not about the age difference, Chamel. It is about the effect it could have on Harry, you, and the team once he is brought in. I do not trifle in other people’s private lives unless I have a distinct interest in results that could come from it. Do you understand my meaning?”

"I hear your words, but they mean little at this point," Tonks snapped. "He is sixteen and you know they have short attention spans. Whatever happens, I will just be a passing interest, but I know that and I am okay with it. My eyes are open and I know what I am doing. Neither of you understand me enough to see where I am coming from. This is no concern of yours to begin with, and you said so yourselves that he is a fighter and always comes out on top in the end. Do you really want to get in his way? Besides if there are any problems, I will handle them."

The three people went quiet as they watched Harry tapping the ring, turning it blue for a second, and then disappearing and reappearing across the room. They watched Harry fail a few times, and he tried even harder as a result. After thirty minutes, Harry was moving about the room quickly and it seemed that he was going where he wanted to.

"Guess I should get down there then. He needs to work on destinations outside of the room and to places he can't see. Then there are the complications from wards and such."

"Horace," Tonks stopped him. "Don't mention anything about wards. Just see what happens."

"Fine, I can leave that for when he buries himself in the side of a building then. No harm to me." Horace said laughing lightly.

'The more I do this the easier it gets and the less I expect to see Cedric when I get there. At least I don't fall down anymore when I land. That is so embarrassing; Harry Potter can't travel by magic without ending up on his bum.'

Harry felt the tug and appeared exactly where he meant to appear. He waited for the return trip which was scheduled for five seconds. *'Four, three, two, one, tug.'* Harry appeared where he started off from standing tall. *'I think I have this down. Just picture the place clearly and do it. Oh, what now?'* Harry watched Horace move towards him with a grim look on his face.

"Well, I guess you should have this one down by now. Let's move to a real application of the spell. I want you to give me a location

somewhere in Britain and then take your portkey there. We don't use portkeys to move about rooms. We use them to move about countries and continents. We use them when Apparation isn't advised. Tell me your location and I will put a Tracking Charm on you so I can find you when you stuff it."

Horace tapped Harry on the shoulder and a faint, grey shimmer appeared where the wand touched him. Harry looked at Horace as he waited impatiently for an answer. *'What place do I know well enough that I can make a portkey to? Nowhere there are muggles that is for sure. That pretty much leaves the Weasleys.'*

"The back field of the Weasleys. Do you know of where I am talking about?"

"I know the Weasley home. I can find you if you make it there," Horace dismissed Harry with a look.

Harry focused on the ring and pictured the location clearly using the same process he had before. He chose a three second timer and a return destination of his exact spot. He tapped the portkey with his wand and it vibrated glowing blue for a second. Harry looked straight into Horace's eyes until the portkey pulled him to the Weasley's back field.

Harry felt a strange sensation wash over him when the world came clearly into view. He stumbled a little from the lightheaded feeling but recovered quickly. He looked around and saw the familiar trees and grass. He turned and saw the oddly shaped house that was the Burrow. He stared at it dreaming of what it would have been like to grow up with a family who loved and cared about each other. Standing amongst the tall grass, he closed his eyes and absorbed the warmth of the sunshine. He heard the birds chirping in the trees and the wind blowing across the field.

He heard human noises and opened his eyes looking in the direction of the Burrow. He saw Ginny in the distance moving around the back garden. She was throwing something but it was too far away to tell what it was. He saw a tall redhead stand up and throw something else.

'Looks like Ron and Ginny are de-gnoming the garden today. I wish I could be down there with them worrying about getting bit or something equally mundane.' Harry sighed and starting slipping into a funk. He could hear a noise from inside the house and Ron and Ginny started moving inside quickly.

'What is wrong? Why are they running inside?' Harry started moving towards the house to see if he could help, but a muffled crack of Apparation stopped him. Harry spun on his heels throwing up an Absolvo Shield and pulling his wand on the newcomer. Harry was preparing a Reductor Curse when he saw the face of Tonks appear from under her hood.

"Harry, we need to leave," Tonks said her voice showing some concern.

"Why, what is going on? Everyone ran inside a few minutes ago. Are the Weasleys in trouble? Tonks tell me."

"Calm down, Harry. No one is in danger but us. I promise they are fine, but you have to come back with me now or we won't be."

"You promise?" Harry wasn't going to let things happen to his friends if he could stop it. Tonks was nodding her head quickly and moving towards him. "Fine, but you will tell me everything when we get there. If I am not satisfied with your answers, I am coming back and finding out for myself."

Harry held out the ring and Tonks grabbed on tightly. Harry tapped the ring activating the return action. As they were leaving, Harry heard the pops of multiple Apparations. When he landed in the training room, he grabbed Tonks by the shoulders and stared into her eyes. "What was going on and who were those people Apparating in?"

"Everything is fine, but let's go somewhere more private to discuss things. The Training room isn't the best place for this." Tonks waited for Harry to agree with her, but he wasn't moving. "If you trust me at all, trust me on this one." She saw him think it over and he nodded finally.

Tonks led him out of the Training room and down the hall to a room labeled Twelve. She opened the door, giving her password, and entered it. Harry saw an average sized room with a couple couches, an overstuffed chair, a work table and chairs, and lockers. On the back wall was a moving mural depicting witches and wizards doing very magical things with wands and swords. It was titled "Team 3". Tonks closed the door and pulled him over to the couch pushing him down and sitting next to him.

"Harry, we can talk here," Tonks began while facing Harry directly. "You took your portkey to the Burrow. Horace followed the Tracking Charm to the coordinates you were at, but he was stopped by the wards guarding the Burrow. He came back here, immediately, and told me you were on warded property and where it was. In short, by you portkeying onto the Weasley's property, you only triggered the Intrusion ward, since you are keyed to access their home. Horace triggered not only the Intrusion ward, but the Apparation ward and other wards the Order put on the Weasley's home.

"They ran inside the Burrow, because the alarms were going off telling them someone had tried and succeeded in gaining access to their land. I know a meeting will be called tonight because both Apparation and a portkey were used."

"And the pops were?"

"The Order members arriving to protect the Weasleys from a perceived attack. If we had stayed, they would have attacked us thinking we were Death Eaters or something. You didn't do anything wrong, but I needed to get you out of there before we were caught. Now, we need to get back to Privet Drive before they do a check on everyone they are watching. If they find you and I missing, Albus will sound the alarm and every member will begin combing the country looking for you. We can talk more when we get you home."

"Fine, let's go." Harry wasn't sure what to do, but he would worry about it when he got home. The last thing he wanted to do was scare the Weasleys.

They exited the room and returned to the Training room. Tonks spoke with Horace quickly and he nodded once at Harry wearing a scowl.

She ran back over to Harry and grabbed his arm and told him to create a portkey home. Harry focused on his sad little room and his magically altered bed and cast the spell on the ring. They both grabbed it and Harry gave it a tap with his wand transporting him 'home.'

As soon as they landed in the room, Harry sunk onto his bed feeling responsible for everything that had happened. Tonks sat down on the bed as well and gave Harry a friendly smile.

"What is wrong, Harry? You did great today."

"I triggered the wards at the Burrow?"

"You tripped the portkey ward, but you are authorized to be there so it wasn't a big deal. Horace trying to follow you was what set the world on its ear. An unauthorized attempted Apparation tends to do that. As soon as he told me where you were and what happened, I knew that I had to get you out of there before everyone showed up all hot and bothered."

"How do you know about the wards at the Burrow?"

"Because, Harry, I helped put them up. I am not all smiles and purple hair you know." Tonks pulled her hair down a little and saw that it was purple right now. She nodded once, more to herself than anyone. "I can weave a ward fairly well. Not like Albus, Filius, or Bill Weasley, but I do okay." She gave Harry a cheeky smile trying to lighten his mood.

"So you managed all the shields he taught you. That was an awesome show you put on when I Apparated to you. What spell were you going to use on me by-the-way?"

"Reductor Curse. I tend to go to that one since it is quick and can cause some damage even if you have a shield up."

Tonks made a nasty face, then shifted it to one of serene innocence before shifting quickly back into her playful mode. "You wouldn't have Reductored little old me would you?" Tonks batted her eyes a few times earning a laugh and smile from Harry. "You did amazingly

today, Harry, you really did. It is so much fun to watch you.” Tonks’ voice grew quieter as she spoke.

Harry looked in her dark, twinkling eyes for a minute. *‘She told me everything I needed to know. She was honest with me. She could have kept things from me, but she didn’t.’*

“Thank you for telling me the truth when I asked for it, Tonks. It really means a lot to me.”

“No problem, Harry,” Tonks said quietly. She smiled her impish smile and couldn’t stop herself from moving closer to Harry.

“Thank you for helping me. I need every bit of it I can get.” Harry watched Tonks smile change slightly as he spoke. He wasn’t sure what to do, but he knew what he wanted to do. “The only thing I won’t thank you for is Horace. You could have gotten Snape for a lot less than him, I am sure.”

“You hate him now, but soon you will be thankful you had him as a teacher. Horace knows how to get the most out of his people. I think it is safe to say that he is getting the most out of you, right?”

“He gets me so mad most times that I just do the spell without thinking about it.”

“His gift is doing just that, Harry. He gets you to do things you never thought you could.”

“Yeah, like killing him.” Harry joked even though the thought had crossed his mind a few times during the day.

Tonks laughed and put her hand on Harry’s side. “I am sure that man has been on the receiving end of more than a few curses intended to end his life, but he sticks around. I think he is too much of a bastard to die when we want him to.”

“I thought the same thing today.” Harry’s eyes never left Tonks’ face. She was leaning forward more than before, and her face wasn’t more than six inches away. Harry looked at her lips and back up to her face.

He swallowed and felt himself leaning in too. *'What am I doing? I am not doing this, am I?'*

Tonks closed the distance and planted her lips on Harry's in a warm but needy kiss. She held it for a few seconds before allowing her mouth to open slightly and her tongue out to ask for entrance to his mouth. She explored the various ways of kissing Harry as they slowly fell over onto the bed. She had her hands tangled up in his hair within seconds of pulling his hood off. She kept kissing him when she could as she pulled his cloak up over his head.

She managed to remove her cloak, too, while never removing more than one hand from Harry's head. Once freed of the protective clothing, she let herself become a little wild. Always in a lip lock, she moved one hand to Harry's shirt and gave a tug pulling it out of his waistband. She repeated the motion on the other side as well receiving no resistance from Harry.

'I have no idea what I am doing, but I love every minute of it. I hope she never sees how pathetic I am at this. Was that her hand or something else?'

Tonks moved her hands around Harry's chest after sliding them under his untucked shirt. *'What are you doing? Why did you have to try and tease him again. Was I even trying to tease? You have talked about this with yourself. You had a conversation with Marcus about this. You...to hell with all of them. This is the best I have felt in years. Harry makes me feel good about myself. He expects nothing from me but friendship. Besides, I can't stop myself. I don't see how anyone could. The best and worst thing I have ever done was to tease Harry Potter.'*

Tonks worked her left hand behind Harry's head and held him firmly to her lips while her right hand was running up and down his chest. She was distracted by a rather deep kiss and her hand got away from her rubbing a little lower than she had intended.

'Oops, that wasn't what I had planned. How did he take it? Just a minor pause and he is back at it. What a guy. Oh, this is a joyous feeling. I could do this for hours.' Tonks continued kissing and rubbing until she felt a Message Spell hit her. *'Always when I am*

enjoying myself they interrupt.' Tonks ignored the message for now and continued snogging Harry. She was starting to feel that warm sensation all over so she opened her eyes and watched Harry do the same.

He looked at her with an eager smile and desire clouding his eyes. He stared a little longer and she waited. *'Do it, Harry. Please do what ever that is again.'* She didn't have to wait for long before she felt a presence enter her mind and her senses were completely overtaken. She felt her urges increase by at least double and new feelings arise in places she had never felt before. *'Who needs an orgasm when I have this?'*

Tonks couldn't stop herself from completely letting go. She had limited control over her hands which spent most of their time clenching and unclenching in Harry's hair, rubbing his chest, or just being somewhere else. She was completely focused on Harry and what he did to her. She took the opportunity to breathe when Harry started kissing her neck and throat. She twitched when he kissed behind her ears so he spent some time on that nearly causing Tonks to lose it.

She was able to move onto Harry a little bit and started moving her body in sync with her wave of desire that was completely in control of her. She was tingling all over but it was worse on her breasts, in her mouth, and in another private place. She had no ability to think anymore. She could only feel and it felt wonderful. Her shallow breaths were slowly turning into muffled moans as she rocked to her own beat.

Harry kept doing what he was doing. His hands found their way to Tonks back and down to her butt. One hand held her in place, sort of, and the other moved slowly up and down her back opposite her rocking motions.

Tonks was nearing a place of wondrous joy when a second Message Spell hit her. *'God dammit all to bloody hell,'* Tonks screamed to herself. *'I am so unsatisfied right now I can't even begin describe it.'* Knowing that the messages would only come more often if she didn't answer, Tonks slowly began to extract herself from her intimacy with

Harry. She had trouble ending the kisses, but with a lot of effort she managed.

Her breathing still wildly out of control, Tonks slowly moved off of Harry. *'Oh, I was so close, too. I am so frustrated I could hurt someone.'* She moved to lie beside Harry and looked into his eyes which were studying her intently.

"You are way too good at that, Harry. I have no idea what you do, but that is truly an amazing thing you do. I didn't stop because I wanted to, trust me I would have went right to the end with it, but the Order are sending me Message Spells and they are kind of annoying. I need to respond and go to Grimmauld Place for the meeting really soon or else they will show up here and cause all sorts of trouble. I will be back tonight after the meeting and I will tell you everything I can. If I can't say anything, please believe me that Albus is using the Secrecy Agreement to prevent me from saying it."

Tonks slowly lifted herself off the bed, righting her clothes, and gathering her cloak. She shot off a reply to the Order. She turned to the bureau and used the mirror to make sure she didn't look like she had done what she had just done. After adjustments had been made, Tonks turned and found Harry sitting up on the bed looking slightly confused.

"What is it, Harry?"

"What are we doing? Us I mean?"

"You are doing what someone your age is supposed to do. You are kissing a pretty girl who lets you kiss her. What is wrong with that?"

"That is great," Harry said with a crooked smile. "I mean I really like doing that, but what about you? What are you doing?"

"Me?" Tonks pondered what she could say at this point to make things sound better than others would describe them. "I am...I have always done things that others told me not to. I am very much like you in that sense if you think about it. People have always seen me a certain way the minute I meet them. You never did that. That makes

you special in my book, as if you need more things for that. I am enjoying our time together and I hope you are as well."

"I am enjoying it. But what are we doing?"

"We are enjoying each other, having fun, and ignoring what others think we should and should not do. How does that sound to you?"

"Are we going to keep doing what we were doing?" Harry asked with worry hanging off every word.

"I can think of no reason to stop now. Can you?" Harry shook his head quickly. "I didn't think so, stud."

"Then I think it sounds good to me, Nymphadora." Harry flashed a smile at Tonks when she tried to lower her eyes and look menacing.

Tonks took a deep breath trying to prevent herself from tackling Harry playfully. She walked up to him, gave him a passionate kiss showing that she was serious about what she had said, then stepped back pulling out her wand.

"Not sure how long this will take, but I will be back as soon as I can, Harry. Get something to eat while your relatives aren't home."

Harry nodded at her and Tonks Apparated to the park near Grimmauld Place.

Tonks appeared in an empty park filled with scattered rubbish. Tonks tapped her cloak saying "Color: Blue" and started walking quickly to Number Twelve. *'I want to be in and out of this meeting fast. I have somewhere better to be for once in my life. And I am still frustrated to no end.'* Tonks reached the plot that contained Number Twelve and thought of the address. The dingy house appeared in front of her and she climbed the steps stumbling on two of them.

She knocked on the door and saw Molly open it for her. "At least you remembered not to ring the bell, unlike my darling sons over there." Molly stabbed a finger in the direction of Fred and George who were sitting in a corner annoying Ron with small, brightly colored items. "We have an emergency and all they can do is make pests of

themselves. If I didn't see them born with my own eyes, I would swear there had been a mistake at St. Mungo's."

"Oh, you love your children more than you can describe, Molly. And you love those two more than any of the others. I heard the stories about you from school. I know the apple didn't fall far from the tree with them. Don't bother denying it."

"Hush, Tonks, the last thing those two need is more justification for causing mischief. If they knew that, there would be no stopping them from declaring an all out prank war on anyone foolish enough to get within twenty feet of them. Now, hold your tongue before they hear you."

"I was in the middle of that before I got called here, thank you very much?" Tonks mumbled.

"What was that dear? You seem a bit agitated today? Everything alright? Man troubles?"

"Things were going very well before I got called here, Molly. I just want to get out of here so I can get back to what I was doing."

"You were watching Harry, right? You weren't off somewhere else pulling a Dung and leaving Harry unprotected?"

"Molly, calm down. I am nothing like that drunk. I was watching Harry as I am supposed to. Just because you are on guard duty doesn't mean you can't have a good time as well."

"You aren't bringing men to the Dursley's to keep you company on your watch are you?" Molly was starting to get all protective of Harry and Tonks needed to stop her before she attracted attention.

"Molly, I am doing my job the best way I know how. Have no worries about Harry's wellbeing although right now he is alone since we are all here, but he can take care of himself."

"Oh, yes, he is alone. We should get this over with so you can get back there. You still have an hour before Dung is supposed to come on." Molly hurried away directing everyone into the kitchen that was

supposed to be in there. Ron and Ginny had to stay out of the meetings. The twins passed their mother ignoring her disappointed, angry, and scared looks.

Tonks waved to Ron and Ginny as she stumbled into the kitchen. The room was full of every Order member. People were squished into every available spot leaving the entryway to Tonks. She leaned up against a counter and made herself as comfortable as possible while standing up.

"About time the little girl showed up," came a biting comment from the only person who would trouble himself to insult her from across the room.

"Why, Snapey, I never knew you cared?" Tonks replied letting her annoyance shine.

"Couldn't be troubled to arrive any earlier? Too busy watching Boy-Wonder sulk in his misery?" Snape jibed.

"You might be surprised, Git. When is this shindig going to start?" Tonks queried.

"Right now, Nymphadora," answered Albus twinkling away.

Tonks held her anger at the use of her name not wanting to prolong the meeting any more than it was. She heard the story from Molly about the wards being triggered getting the kids inside. She heard from Moody and Remus who were the first on-scene at the Burrow after the wards went off. They reported that they saw two people in grey cloaks disappear as they arrived. A scan of the area revealed nothing out of the ordinary and the wards were still intact. Snape blamed the 'obvious' hole in the wards on Tonks since she helped put them up.

Tonks thanked Snape for his opinion by flipping him off and looking bored. She wanted to leave and there was nothing they could say that she didn't already know. Her thoughts were interrupted by Albus asking her a question.

"Nymphadora, how is Harry doing so far?"

“Other than what I mentioned to you, he is fine. He is doing pretty well considering everything.” Tonks didn’t elaborate when the others asked what she meant. Albus did his best to stop the questions too, but it was obvious that Molly was going to corner Albus after the meeting and pick his brain. Tonks stared at the floor and waited for the meeting to end which it finally did after thirty minutes. She walked out of the kitchen and headed for the door.

‘Finally I can leave.’ Tonks was walking down the hallway and getting closer to the door with every step. “Tonks, is Harry doing okay?” Asked Ginny from the side of the hallway. Ron was standing next to her and looked as eager for an answer as Ginny.

“Harry is doing pretty well. He has his moments, but for the most part he is dealing. How are you guys?” Tonks looked at each of them.

“Had a little start today, but everything is fine. All healed up from our adventure at least. Mum was going spare for the first few days. Today was the first time she let us out and look what happens.” Ron shrugged and played off his mother’s concern.

“Don’t worry about today,” Tonks said. “Nothing happened and no one knows who it was. The wards worked like they were supposed to. I really need to get back so I should get moving. You both know that Harry can’t be left to himself for more than thirty minutes without finding something to get into. He is so like a two-year-old in that respect. See ya.”

Tonks moved to the door and left the foreboding house. She Apparated from the front step directly to Harry’s room. When she appeared, she found a plate with a few crumbs sitting on his desk and Harry spread out eagle on his bed. His glasses were on his desk as well and his clothes were hung up. Harry was covered by a sheet and wasn’t wearing a shirt. Tonks smiled at the sight.

She pulled a vial of brown potion out of her cloak and downed it quickly. *‘There’s dinner and now to get some sleep too.’* Tonks pulled off her cloak and draped it over the rickety chair next to the desk. She unbuttoned her pants and slid them off setting them on the chair along with her shirt. Tonks unhooked her bra and dropped that onto the ever-growing pile on the chair. She pulled out her bag from under

bed and found a t-shirt to wear. She slipped it over her head but didn't finish putting it on.

She looked at Harry and then at the mirror. She closed her eyes and changed into her normal self. She opened her eyes finding her larger breasts where they belonged and sighed. She looked at herself a little longer and then put her arms through the holes and pulled the shirt the rest of the way on. She waved her wand over her mouth and cleaned her teeth.

Tonks pulled the sheet back and slipped under it trying not to disturb Harry. She covered herself with the sheet and slowly moved back against Harry. She relaxed as Harry shifted and his arms snaked around her. *'Oh, I so love this.'* She felt his warmth envelope her and the safe feeling returned as strong as ever. Tonks couldn't help but think about their snog session earlier. She was reliving it, moment for moment in her mind, when she realized that she was breathing heavy again.

She moved a hand lower and found that she had most definitely 'relived' the experience to a certain degree. *'I stand no chance with him. If remembering things can get me going, I have no hope of stopping things if they get hot and heavy between us. Maybe I should distance myself from him...Not a chance of that happening if I have anything to say about it. And thankfully, I do.'*

Tonks fell asleep in Harry's arms, again, and she slept very comfortably through the night. Dung was out in the garden planning his next 'business deal' under the cover of an invisibility cloak. A person under his own invisibility cloak stood across the street from Number Four and was looking through an eyepiece. The man studied the house for a few minutes before sighing. He put the eyepiece away in a hidden pocket on his cloak. He shook his head as he tapped a portkey and disappeared from the very muggle street. Marcus appeared in his own home, seconds later, in deep thought wondering what he should do.

5. Shopping

The house was completely quiet as Harry felt a twitch in his right shoulder. It was a very bothersome twitch and he couldn't remain asleep with the irritation. He was half awake trying to rotate the pain away when he realized that he was on his back and Tonks was lying on top of him. He was able to complete a few passes of his shoulder without disturbing her. Pain gone, Harry looked at the person who was covering him more than the sheet.

Her hair was spread across his chest in rivulets moving slightly with every breath. Her nose breached the curtain of hair and sent her expelled breath through the hair. Tonks' head was comfortably nestled on Harry's left shoulder forcing his left arm to hold her in place. Her left hand was holding his right side firmly preventing him from leaving or moving too much. Harry smiled as he finally felt like he had a place to belong. *'I like this so much. I feel good here. I feel like I am supposed to be here. Is this what everyone else feels like most of the time?'*

Harry continued assessing his position. Tonks' left leg was draped over his. She was pressed against the full length of his body or as much of it as she covered. Harry closed his eyes and reveled in the feeling of Tonks' body against his. The warmth and softness was something he had never experienced before outside of this summer. Now that he had felt it, Harry craved the sensation. Comforting and special, Harry yearned to feel it as often as possible.

A deep breath from Tonks' forced Harry's eyes open again. He watched as Tonks snuggled her head deeper into his shoulder and chest. He felt her breasts rub against his side and he fought with his hormone-driven thoughts. *'Keep it together. Tonks is just a friend...who you have been snogging with every night since you got here. She is just playing around, it means nothing to her. Her eyes say different.'* Harry continued to watch Tonks shift in her sleep and his body was responding accordingly. *'Bollocks, this is going to be embarrassing when she wakes up.'*

A few minutes more of Tonks trying to dig into Harry's body and she settled. Harry couldn't see her eyes, but he could feel her heart

beating steady and strong. He could feel his reaction pressing against her leg and he hoped that she wouldn't laugh at him when she woke up.

"Morning, Harry," Tonks said softly in a very female voice. Harry reacted even worse than he already had. "I 'feel' you are awake and ready for a new day."

'Oh hell, she doesn't stop.' Harry looked down as Tonks cleared her hair away from her face. Harry saw a warm and hungry look in her eyes once they were uncovered. He hesitated before speaking. "I, um, sorry Tonks, I just..."

Tonks cut him off by placing her hand behind his head and pulling herself up to his face. Her lips met his and quickly her tongue was involved. She kissed him like her life was at stake. She pressed her lips to his in a hungry desperation. Her tongue flicked around his mouth in a never-ending race. Her breathing accelerated and her body moved slowly upwards making the kisses easier to perform.

As she snogged Harry for everything he was worth, Tonks moved her body into a position where she was more on top of him than before. Her left leg had made it to the other side of his body preventing him from moving in that direction and her left foot had curled under his right knee locking them together more firmly. Her chest was pleasantly resting on Harry's and he could feel her nipples move against his skin from behind the fabric of her shirt.

The kisses continued but the fevered-pitch slowed to a steadier and heated pace. They were deeper and more thorough kisses. Harry decided to let Tonks control the pace and anything else she wanted. *'She knows better than I do. I am the teenaged-boy here.'* Her right leg had taken up a position to his left effectively giving her all control in the matter of the morning's activities.

Harry was regaining control of his own body, especially one very excited spot, when he felt her hips move against his own. He paused as he felt her flat stomach roll against his lower abdomen. She was moving slowly but that didn't matter to an excited fifteen-year-old. Harry responded by thrusting his hips upward and rubbing against her. Tonks never skipped a beat and repeated the motion earning her

a similar response. A dozen or so repetitions and she changed her angle.

Tonks lowered herself to lie flush with Harry's body. She rubbed herself, up and down along Harry's body, moving her pelvis slowly around his crotch. Harry could feel the heat being put off by her and he loved every minute. He smelled something that he couldn't place, but he liked it all the same. As Tonks moved the heat increased and Harry was beginning to worry about certain things happening. He pulled away from her eager mouth and wanted to ask her a question before he became too worked up.

Tonks opened her eyes enough to see his face and cut off his question with her mouth while moving her right hand from his chest to his crotch. She moved it slowly around telling him everything he needed to know. The pace increased and Harry was starting to feel the pressure down there. He wanted her to feel the same thing so he broke the kiss and stared at her face until she opened her eyes.

He forced his way into her mind like he had done before and she put up no resistance. The warm feeling his body was undergoing was shared by his mind. He saw swirls of warm, soft colors and felt a gust of heated air pass through his head. He felt a burning sensation in his lower regions that wasn't there before. He heard a soft squeal of pleasure escape Tonks' mouth right before he covered it with his own.

Tonks moved her hips faster and with more determination than previously. She was rubbing and moving around faster and faster. Her breathing had increased to short and fast breaths. Harry's hands had moved from her sides to her back and lower when she moved upward. Her firm butt was higher with her last stroke and Harry held it tightly in his hands. He flexed his fingers squeezing the muscle and skin and heard another sound escape from Tonks' throat.

Harry gave a slight push on her rear and she responded by moving in the same direction. She pushed against him forcefully earning a moan from Harry. They continued the movement a few times before the heat became overwhelming under the sheet. In one swift motion of her left arm, Tonks threw the sheet off of them and sat up placing her hips directly above Harry's.

She placed both her hands on his chest and pushed. Her hips were moving around and Harry felt the pressure in himself increase again. He opened his eyes to see Tonks above him rocking back and forth. Her hair was mussed and she wasn't showing any signs of slowing. Harry moved his hands to the sides of her hips and slowed her somewhat. Tonks opened her eyes and looked right into Harry's.

He saw the hunger had been replaced by desire and that was all he could see. He forced his way into her welcoming mind again feeling his urges increase. Tonks bucked forcefully and proceeded to grind herself into Harry's groin. She kept her eyes open and stared into his face as she sped up her actions. Harry watched as her eyes sparkled with passion as she writhed around on top of him. He knew he was beyond the point of no return, but he didn't care. It was only a matter of time and he would have a mess to clean up.

Tonks smiled a smile that Harry could only describe as lustful. She found her pace and maintained it until she was squealing softly with each of Harry's moans. They were staring at each other and were in perfect sync. Tonks breathing was fast and steady now, but Harry's was fast and wild. Tonks changed the pace to a slower but more forceful stroke. With each one, Harry felt like he would lose it, but he managed to hold on surprising himself.

Tonks' breathing had changed, again, to desperate breaths with each stroke. Her eyes were becoming unfocused and she was gripping Harry's shoulders tightly. Her squeals had gotten louder and Harry's moans were matching her noises. They were moving together and Harry felt a burning sensation. He thrust once and he finally felt the release. Tonks squealed louder than any other time, thus far, and collapsed onto Harry's chest.

Her body was racked with her deep breaths and some small shivers. Harry allowed himself to calm somewhat before he wrapped his arms around her small body. Having no idea what to say or do, Harry went with the safest thing he could think of. "Cold, Tonks?" *'I may be the Boy-Who-Lived, but I have no idea what the hell to do here.'*

"You really have no clue what you did and what happened, do you?" Tonks asked looking up into his eyes. "You are so cute and innocent."

“First time for everything, so I think I am entitled to being clueless, Nymphadora.”

Tonks hesitated, and then smiled sweetly. “Yes, you are, Harry.” She took a deep breath and continued. “I am not sure how that happened, but I just wanted to kiss you at first. That turned into snogging which turned into rubbing which turned into dry humping...you have no reason to worry about keeping your women happy in the future. You might not know what you are doing, but you improvise better than anyone else I know.”

“Thanks, I think.”

“That is a compliment, Harry. Thank you very much.”

“For what, exactly?”

“For making me happy and feeling wanted. And whatever you do with that form of Legilimency. Wow!”

“I don’t do Legilimency, do I?”

“Yes, Harry, you do. It is the most pleasant application of that particular skill I have experienced, but it is the same. You are very good at it and I hope you keep practicing it with me.” Tonks eyes narrowed and she looked like a hopeful and satisfied woman.

“If this is what will happen every time, I think I can make that promise then.” Harry tried to hide the rising blush as he realized exactly what he had just done with Tonks.

Tonks half closed her eyes and murmured to herself, “Thank Merlin for that.” Her mouth spread into a smile and she snuggled into Harry’s neck since she was still on top of him. “Are you going to kiss me, Harry?”

“Do you want me to?”

“After an orgasm like that, you can do just about anything you want.” Tonks said quietly and smiled. Slowly her eyes widened and her mouth opened into an ‘O’ shape. “Oops, I shouldn’t have said that.”

At Harry's completely puzzled look, she explained. "Harry, you are young. I know this and I shouldn't have done what I did with you."

"I was doing it as well, Tonks. Besides, you have said that I act older than I am."

"True, you do, Harry, but until now it has only been teasing and kissing. I kind of went further this time."

"I understand," Harry said in a depressed way. "If you want, we can forget this ever happened."

"No," Tonks said quickly. "I want to...I need to...I am lost Harry. I know what I want and I think I know what I need, but this is far more complicated for me than it is for you."

"What is and why?"

"First off, you are a guy, Harry, and thank Merlin for that. The rules are different for men than they are for women when it involves relationships. Second, I am the adult and people expect me to be in control. If you couldn't tell, I lose control when it comes to you. I become young schoolgirl when I kiss you. I am not sure why, but I lose complete and total control of myself. Even if I wanted to be in control, I couldn't do it. Third, you are you. I am a nobody and you are Harry Potter. That just wouldn't sit well with others. You are supposed to be with a pure-blooded princess or something like that not a half-blooded goofball."

"I don't care what others think or say, Tonks. I am deciding what my life is going to be like now. I will not live by others wishes, wants, or expectations. I am taking control of my life and you should too. You are giving me the opportunity to make that happen and if I can do that for you then I will."

"It is not the same thing, Harry. I...do you like me, Harry?"

Harry paused and thought about the question. "Yes, I like you Tonks. Why do you need to ask?"

"How do you like me? A friend, a fuck-buddy, a passing interest? What is your motivation?"

"You are my friend, Tonks. Anything more than that I can't really tell. This is all new to me." Harry wasn't sure what was going on but it seemed important to Tonks.

"Marcus talked to me yesterday about us." Harry gave a confused look. "He is very good at reading people's intentions, Harry. You are a fifteen-year-old male so you are very easy to read as far as a few things are concerned. He knew I was interested in you by the way I talked about you. He knew it was just a matter of time before my flirty nature would lead to something like this and he told me to distance myself from you."

"What business of his is it about what we do?" Harry asked feeling his anger rise.

"It is his business if it disrupts the teams. It has happened before and they frown on coupling inside of teams."

Harry heard what she said but couldn't get past the word coupling. "Are we a couple then?"

"I don't know," Tonks admitted. "It would be nice to have someone, but I doubt you would want to be with me. I am older than you. I am not much to look at compared to those you could get. I am a klutz most of the time unless I am really focused."

"Well, I am socially inept thanks to my relatives. I am scrawny. I have a nasty looking scar on my head. My luck is bound to run out soon, and I attract the attention of psychopaths. I'd say I am worse off."

"You are none of those things, Harry. You are a hero to many. You are cute and sexy, and you turn a wonderful red color. Yep, that is the one." Tonks said pointing to the red color forming on Harry's cheeks.

Harry forced the blush away and tried to think of something to say in return. "You are a great person, Tonks. You are cute and sexy as well. I have fun with you." Harry thought of the big one and chose to say it. "You are helping me stay alive. That means a lot to me. Everyone

else would have locked me away for safekeeping. You are letting me make my own way through this. You are letting me be my own person. I am not about to give up on you, now am I?"

Tonks heard the passion in Harry's voice and he was dead serious the whole time he spoke. "You really believe in me, don't you?"

"Of course I do. You not only believe in me, but you are willing to help me. I like you for all those reasons and more. You have helped me in getting over Sirius. I am not there yet, but you have gotten me to where I am. Thank you."

"You are welcome but back to us. I enjoy being with you, Harry. You make me happy, in more ways than one." Tonks smiled seductively then giggled. "I am not about to let you go this easily. Remember, I do many things that I am told not to do."

Feeling playful and more self-assured than he had in years, Harry made a comment. "You shouldn't kiss me again. It is a very bad thing to do, Nymphadora." Harry watched as Tonks smiled and stretched up to kiss him. Their lips met and images of earlier swam to the forefront of his mind. Harry forced himself to concentrate on the present and remember the rest later when he had time.

They kissed for a few minutes before Harry felt his body react again. Tonks shifted to give Harry some room for himself and continued kissing. She lessened her kisses until they were very light. She pulled back and gazed into Harry's eyes. "You can call me Nymphadora when we are alone if you want. It sounds nice coming from you. I have enough names to remember without you coming up with another one."

"Thank you, Nymphadora. Your help and friendship means a lot to me." His playful mood returning, Harry added, "and snogging you is a bit of alright too." Harry rolled over, dumping Tonks off, and slipped out of the bed. He moved back to the door and waited for the attack. It never came but a few giggles did from the roll of sheets. "What is so funny?"

“Look for yourself,” Tonks said peeking out of a fold in the sheets. Harry looked down and saw what was so funny. His blush returned full strength and he spun to hide the front of his boxers.

“When you are finished laughing at me, could you hand me my wand?” Harry said.

“I get you off once and you forget you can summon your wand on your own. Which part do we need to practice, do you think?”

Harry hung his head in embarrassment. He summoned his wand into his hand instantly and cast the Cleaning Charm on his clothing. He sighed then turned around and faced the still laughing woman in his bed. As her giggles subsided, she began unwrapping herself from the sheets. Finally, she threw off the sheet completely and watched Harry’s eyes bulge a little among other things as well.

“Like what you see?” She asked teasingly moving her arm above her head and moving her legs slightly apart.

Harry controlled himself and then started to laugh. Tonks sexy smile dropped into a confused look. “What is so funny, mister?” Harry laughed even harder forcing him to make his way to his desk so he could sit down.

Tonks was really worried now. She looked at her breasts and saw that they were as covered as they were going to get. She sat up a little and looked down at her underwear. The green lace panties were in place, but there was a white spot showing just how excited Tonks had been during their activities. Tonks thought of getting embarrassed but chose to push the limits even further with Harry.

“It is just proof you can satisfy a woman. Do you want to try again, Harry? Maybe we could try to wake up your relatives this time. I think we have enough time for another tumble.” Tonks watched as all humor left Harry’s face. Desire and eagerness replaced the smile for a few seconds before Harry became serious.

“I joke about sex, Harry. Get used to it. I am serious in a way, but we should get ready to leave soon. Friday’s are short days for us. We usually only stay until lunch then we enjoy the rest of our day doing

our own thing. I am sure Horace wants to finish up his lesson on transportation from yesterday. You should have the portkey thing down now so you should move on to Apparition next. Think what fun you can have with that.”

Tonks slid out of the bed slowly letting Harry watch every movement carefully. She let her legs dangle for a short time before standing up. She looked into his eyes until he met her gaze. “Keep your mind on the task at hand while working, Harry. I will always be there at the end of the day for you to play with when you are done.”

“You aren’t a plaything, Tonks. You are a friend of mine. I don’t see you as a toy.”

“You had better see me as something to play with some of the time, Harry, or we will have words.” Tonks let a smile grow on her face. “And it is Nymphadora when we are alone, Harry.”

“Yes, Nymphadora, I will remember.”

Tonks turned and bent over to retrieve things from her hidden bag of clothing. She heard Harry take a deep breath through his teeth when she bent over. *‘I love doing that to him. He will be so much fun this summer. At least I am not frustrated like I was last night. He has skills, that is for sure, but practice make perfect.’*

Tonks picked out her daywear and threw on her cloak so there wouldn’t be a repeat of the previous day’s morning-encounter with Petunia. *‘Once is more than enough and this time she could see that something happened, and happen it did, oh baby.’*

Harry watched her leave the room and disappear from view. He fell back on to his bed and covered his eyes. *‘What did I just get myself into? What is going on here? Damn she is hot... Bugger, I can’t even keep my mind off her when she isn’t in the room. Is this a good thing to do? I don’t know, but I am going to enjoy it while it lasts.’*

Harry sat up and decided he should get tidy up his room while he had the time. He located all of his dirty clothes and dumped them into a pile in the corner. His books were straightened and his quill set

organized. Harry looked around his room and saw that Hedwig was in her cage staring at him with an odd look.

“What did I do, Hedwig?” She didn’t respond. “Fine, what did I forget to do?” Hedwig ruffled her feathers a little but kept her place. “Stuffed it up real good this time then, I am sorry Hedwig. Please forgive me and tell me what you need.” The owl dipped her head in the direction of the food and water dishes. “Oh shit. How long has it been, girl?”

Harry opened his trunk and found a bag of treats and some owl food. He gave Hedwig two treats ignoring the pain when she ‘accidentally’ nipped his fingers. Harry grabbed the water tray and left his room in search of water. With the bathroom occupied by Tonks, Harry went to the kitchen. He entered the room and filled the dish from the tap. He bounded up the stairs, into his room again, and slid the tray towards Hedwig.

She looked at him and then at the bottom of her cage. Getting the hint, Harry Vanished the waste with his wand. For the first time since he saw her that morning, Hedwig relaxed and took a drink. “I am sorry, girl. I guess I have been a little preoccupied lately.”

“And I heard every sound of it too, Potter.”

Harry spun on his heels and leveled his wand at the blob in the doorway. “Bugger off, Dud,” Harry snapped. “I haven’t the time for you right now.”

Dudley was wearing a t-shirt that barely fit him and sweatpants that were at their very limits to contain his girth. “Why? Off to shag your woman somewhere else? I heard you through the wall, well her anyway. Thought you weren’t shagging her.”

“You know thinking isn’t your best quality, Dud. Maybe you should leave that for others to do. Just be the muscle and everything will be alright.”

“Give me one good reason not to tell Mum.”

"I don't give a shit if you do tell her, Dud. I do not care what she thinks or what she expects. My life is my life and she has nothing to say about it."

"I could tell Dad. It would be fun to watch him beat you up again."

"And I would drop him like the sack of shite that he is. If you really want to see your own father hurt, by all means, tell him. I am done letting others run my life. Get in my way, Dudley, and I will run you over. Do not test me on this. Another thing, hassle Tonks at all, and I will break every bone in your body. That is a promise." Harry lowered his wand and turned back to his dirty clothes and cast the Cleaning Charm on them. He started hanging them up or folding them so they could be put away.

Dudley stood in the doorway and watched as Harry moved about the room confidently. His little piggy eyes followed every movement and every action closely. Something had changed about Harry and he didn't know what it was. "What is different about you? Something isn't right and I don't know what it is."

Harry stopped cleaning his room and turned to his massive cousin. "Like I said, thinking isn't your strong point. I am the same as I always have been. I may just be more like I am at school right now then how I usually am here. Get used to the change because I am not going back to how it was before. I am what I am, Dud."

Dudley was about to make a comment, but a sharp jab from a wand in his back silenced him. "Budge over you great lump." Tonks slipped in the room quickly and ignored the shocked look on Dudley's face. "Harry, you cleaned your room. How nice. After we are done at work, I will take you to my place so you can clean it as well. I am not a very tidy person if you couldn't tell."

"Not in the slightest, Nymphadora." Harry ducked when she threw her dirty clothes at him. "That is for your cheek, Harry. Now, be a good boy and clean those too. I am running out of clothes over here and I doubt you want me walking around your room naked tomorrow." Tonks looked up from her nearly empty bag and saw the look on Harry's face. "Then again, you probably do want me walking around your room naked. Oh well, I guess I will play it by ear."

“Are you going to leave soon, Dud?” Harry asked showing his displeasure at Dudley’s presence. “I have a few things to take care of and it would be best if you weren’t here for them.” Harry watched as Dudley backed out of his room and walked down the hallway. Harry closed the door and let out a breath. “He heard us, Nymphadora.”

“He heard what, Harry?” Tonks gave a big smile and waited for Harry to answer.

“You love this, don’t you?”

“What?” Tonks asked innocently. “Making you embarrassed? Most definitely. Teasing you? Yep, that too. Reminding you of this morning? Anytime I can get away with it safely.” Tonks saw that Harry wasn’t exactly enjoying her humor this early in the morning. “Oh, Harry, let it go. Don’t worry about that worthless git. He is an idiot and I doubt he would say anything to anyone. Now, take your shower so we can leave and be sure to bring your vault key in case we have time to go shopping.”

Harry left the room and returned ten minutes later. He found Tonks sitting on his bed humming to herself. “Keeping busy, Nymphadora?”

Tonks sat up and smiled brightly. “The more you say it the more I like hearing it. Yes, I am keeping myself busy. Now, create the portkey so we can leave this ever so pleasant location.”

Harry picked up one of his used quills from its arranged location on his desk and tapped it with his wand. It turned blue for a second before he extended it for Tonks to grab. She grabbed it with her right hand and flipped up her hood. Harry copied her actions and waited for the timer to go off. The tug signaled the beginning of the trip and Harry readied himself for another day of abuse and anger. He arrived in the atrium of the Ministry and saw a group of people waiting to pass through the checkpoint.

Tonks didn’t hesitate a second before striding past the queue of people. Harry sighed and followed Tonks to the front of the queue. A few people mumbled something, but no one said anything too loud. The guard was visibly flustered by the number of people waiting and the presence of two Unspeakables didn’t make it any easier for him.

Tonks and Harry walked to the lifts and pressed the button. The lift arrived and they proceeded to the ninth floor.

"You know you could have made the portkey take us directly to our level, right?"

"I didn't know that?" Harry said.

"You made it take you right to the training room yesterday. Why would things be different today?"

"I, I don't know. I guess I didn't think about it. "

"All portkeys go through the wards and the wards block anyone who isn't authorized. You are authorized so why not take advantage of it in the future. Remember, you are an Unspeakable. Being one gives you all sorts of privileges and freedoms. Use them when you need to or what use is it to have them."

"I will try to remember that, Chamel. I am still getting used to the new me so bear with me here."

"No problem. By the way, I like the new you. He is all cute and sexy," Tonks was cheery and Harry couldn't help but smile at her.

"I doubt Horace will care about that aspect of me." The lift chimed and they exited into the hallway. Tonks opened the door and Harry followed her to the training room. What he saw surprised him a bit.

There were a lot of people here today. Harry could count the number of groups easier than the people. He saw a group that looked like the same three from the day before. He saw two other groups on the far side of the room which looked to have three people each. At the range, he saw at least five people but he wasn't sure. A loud voice prevented him from counting any further.

"Chamel, Recruit, over here." Horace was in the classroom area of room and he was looking impatient. Harry followed Tonks over there and settled into a chair behind a desk. He pulled out his journal and readied himself to take notes. "How did his portkeys work, Chamel?"

“Like they were supposed to, Horace. Did you have any doubts?”

“Of course I did. I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t doubt the fact that the recruits can even feed themselves without proper training. Now, today I want you to master Apparition. You have the whole coordinate thing down so this shouldn’t be too difficult. There are a few types of Apparition; self, forced, and side-along. The first is self-explanatory. The second is where you drag an unwilling or unconscious person with you while Apparating. The unwilling can fight you so it is a battle of wills mostly. You must overpower the other while Apparating. We do not advise you to do this until you are very comfortable with the process. If the person is unconscious, then it is almost like side-along only a little more difficult. Side-along is what parents do, if they can, with their children. The traveler is willing and doesn’t fight the effort to Apparate.

“Now, you will yourself from one location to another. It is just like the Portus spell only you are the object being moved not something else. There is no incantation and you must concentrate, fully, or you will leave a bit of yourself behind. This is painful for you and funny for me. The key in this exercise is to bore me to death. No splinching or I will take my time fixing you. You will feel like you are being squeezed through a hose or a very tight space. The smoother you are at this, the less noise you will make when you appear at your destination. A near silent Apparition will earn you a bar for stealth alone. Make this skill a priority for you to master. Range is based on your skill and power. Now, focus on your destination and will yourself to the location.”

Horace walked away from the classroom area and stopped beyond the doorway and placed an X on the floor. He looked at Harry and nodded with a scowl. He turned and ventured over to the range and started barking out orders and criticism. Harry looked at Tonks and she smiled at him.

“Go ahead and give it a try. I will be over at the range working on my aim. I have to keep up with you don’t I? It takes awhile to get anywhere with this so don’t get discouraged if you find yourself in the same place after an hour or so.” Tonks turned and joined the others at the range.

Harry turned and looked at the X on the floor a distance away. He ran through the instructions in his head and tried to apply the same technique he used with portkeys. After half an hour of focusing, visualizing, swearing, and grunting; Harry had yet to move an inch. *'Bollocks!'*

Tonks was firing off spell after spell and she couldn't get any better than an 84 on accuracy. *'How does he get 80's and 90's consistently? I could spend every day here and never get those scores, not to mention I am hopelessly behind in power. Mid-70's are the best I seem to do with the occasional 80's on certain ones. I could knock down a door, but he could knock down a whole house. I wonder if he could take on a dragon.'* Tonks continued firing for what seemed like an eternity until she felt a tap on her shoulder. She saw Marcus standing next to her and he waved her over to an unused corner of the room.

When they reached it, Marcus put up a Privacy Dome and spoke. "I asked what was going on with Harry yesterday and then I see you sleeping in his bed. What is going on and do I have to be more concerned than I already am?"

"You what? What were you doing last night at Harry's house?"

"My job, Chamel. It is my job to make sure these teams work and there are no problems internally. You know the past results from inter-team relations. They do not work. They get people killed. Who am I going to bury this time? You, Cal, Harry? Who?"

"None of us, Marcus. As bad as it is that you were spying on us, at Harry's no less, we are fine. We are going to see where this takes us and that is that. I am happy and you should be happy for me." Tonks was trying to control her anger but she didn't want to lose whatever it was she had with Harry. He made her feel good about herself in a way she had never felt with someone. The anguish showed on her face.

A very soft pop sounded from behind Marcus and he spun around, wand out. Harry grabbed the wand in his left hand and aimed his wand at Marcus's throat. "What is going on, Chamel?"

Marcus saw first hand what Horace had been trying to describe. He saw Harry's eyes and determination was what shone brightly in them. He felt the raw power emanating from Harry as well. He waited for Tonks to answer and left his wand comfortably in Harry's grasp.

"He was asking me about you, Harry. He has a problem with us becoming involved like I said earlier. I told him that everything is fine and it wouldn't be a problem for us."

"Is that alright with you, Marcus?" Harry asked. His eyes were still sharp and he was ready to fight in an instant.

"I reserve the right to bring this up at a later time, but right now I see no problem with your current arrangement, Praecepts."

"Praecepts?" Harry questioned.

"Yes, that is your name, Praecepts. Let's shorten it to Ceps. It means dangerous in Latin and right now, with your wand ready to strike me down, I think it fits you quite well. I doubt Horace could think of a more fitting name. If I am not mistaken, you weren't here a moment ago and now you are. Does this mean you have Apparated successfully?"

"I guess so," Harry said noncommittally deciding to describe the feeling. "I felt like I couldn't breathe and was being forced through too-small-a-space if that helps."

"You Apparated alright, Ceps," said Marcus as happily as he could with a wand less than an inch from his jugular. "You were nearly silent as well. I think Horace will want to perfect your execution of this skill. Now, if I may, I must return to less exhilarating efforts."

Marcus stepped back and put his wand away. He nodded to Harry and Tonks and left the room. Horace had watched the entire exchange from the range and wondered what had happened. He knew Harry had Apparated because the room's wards notified him of the spell occurring. As he walked over to Harry, a Message spell from Marcus filled in all the blanks.

"I see you finally managed to Apparate after, an hour," Horace said after checking his watch. "Congratulations and all that. Now, do it faster and quieter. Move!" Horace walked away and left Harry to figure out how to accomplish what he was told.

Most of the morning disappeared and Harry had barely found his way concerning Apparition. He had found that as similar as it was supposed to be to portkey creation, it wasn't. He had tried many different techniques but nothing seemed to work very well.

"You will figure it out, Ceps," Tonks said quietly. "Again, everyone is different and this usually takes people awhile to master. At least your portkeys are spot on if you need to get somewhere."

"I don't understand," Harry said frustrated. "I did this earlier why can't I do it now?"

"Easy," Tonks said acting like it was the easiest thing in the world to figure out. "There is no damsel in distress so you are thinking too hard. Just let it happen, will yourself to where you want to be."

"Ceps," Horace made his presence known, "You are a pathetic failure at Apparition so we will move on to something else. You told me that you have been under the Imperius Curse before and I want to see it for myself. On guard!" Horace drew his wand and cast the spell instantly.

Harry had no time for a wand so he threw up an Absolvo shield and jumped backwards rolling away from Horace. The curse struck the shield but penetrated almost hitting Harry. As Harry was planting his feet, he drew his wand and pointed it at Horace but saw he was no longer there. A quick scan of the room told Harry that the room was gone and he was in a large grass field. *'God dammit. Doesn't he ever get tired of fighting?'*

Harry moved away from his current position and began his retreat turning his head constantly. *'Bugger, why do I always forget to use what I have?'* Harry tapped his cloak and disappeared. He cast a Silencing spell on his feet and looked for any clear spot amongst the grass so he wouldn't create an extremely visible void. There were no

trees but the field had a few small rises to use as cover. Harry started moving towards them but kept a sharp eye out of any threat.

A good thirty yards away from the hills, Harry felt the attack begin. He dove to the side and put up his Absolvo shield as a spell flew past him. He started firing Reductors and Cutting Curses in the direction of the attackers. He knew there was more than one but less than four by counting the number of spells flying at him at one time. Most were the Imperius Curse but a few twisting red curses were thrown in for good measure as the volleys continued.

Harry returned fire switching to the bone curses. He heard one opponent go down with a scream. Harry was worried about his sanity when he rejoiced at hearing the scream. *'I am not like him. I do not enjoy the pain of others. I am only happy because there is one less enemy. That is all there is to it.'*

Moving quickly to the hills and finding a good location to view the field, Harry waited for the next wave. He strengthened his Silencing spell and watched the grass for any movement. Nothing happened for a few minutes and he was getting worried. *'I hope I didn't really hurt the guy. I know this is just a test, but I don't want to hurt people I work with... He attacked me with Crucio and I returned fire. I will not feel bad about it. Voldemort doesn't have any sympathy and I can't beat him by wasting my time feeling sorry for everyone who tries to hurt me. This may just be training, but it is real enough and should be treated as such. Now where are they?'*

Harry came up with a quick plan and executed it. "Accio Unspeakable." Harry summoned whoever was to his right. A shape came flying towards Harry from fifty feet away. He stunned the man and let him crumple into the ground upon landing. A spell shot at him from the left and center forcing Harry to dive out of the way. A third spell, from the top of the hill, struck Harry in the back while he was on the ground.

Immediately, Harry felt a calm wash over him and a voice told him to lower his wand and surrender. Harry fought the voice and regained his feet and turned to meet the attacker. A second person cancelled

the invisibility charm on Harry's cloak and the third person joined the second in an offensive formation.

"Drop your wand, Ceps!" Ordered the first man.

"No!" Said Harry refusing to comply with the spell and order. His mind was fighting off the effects of the spell. He had almost beaten it when the second man cast the same spell on Harry. Harry now had two people ordering him to lower his wand and he was fighting the spells as hard as he could.

"I will not surrender my wand," Harry choked out. He was resisting and gaining some ground in throwing off the spells. The third person cast the spell too adding even more force against Harry's mind. Harry's knees buckled under the sheer presence of three people ordering him to do the same thing.

The fight in his mind seemed to last forever. Harry fought off the calm feeling and tried to remain in reality. *'If Voldemort can't beat you, then these three can't either.'* The voice in the back of Harry's mind was shouting over the other voices keeping him in control. Finally, Harry managed to stand and bring his wand to bear on the third person.

"Ossis Fragmen," Harry whispered. The man dove away from the vicious spell and his curse was broken. With that pressure lifted, Harry turned on the others and quickly broke their spells as well. No one was hit by Harry's attacks because they were so far away and could react in time to avoid them. Harry willed himself to move away from his current location as fast and as silently as he could. He felt the squeezing sensation and appeared behind the first man without a sound.

Harry lifted his wand and stunned the man with a direct hit to his head. The other two heard the man fall and fired spells at Harry rapidly. Harry willed himself behind the others and he appeared where he wanted to be. Another two quick stunners and Harry was alone in the field with three fallen opponents. Harry looked at his enemies and took a deep breath to regain some much needed oxygen.

The feeling of danger caused Harry to roll away as a twisting, red bolt of light soared over him. Harry got to his feet and saw a black cloaked

figure twenty feet away. The bone-white mask told Harry that he was facing a Death Eater and that this was for real. All thoughts of training evaporated and he fell into survival mode like he had so many times before.

The Death Eater fired the Killing Curse at Harry and he dove away. From his place on the ground, Harry fired the Cruciatus Curse and missed the target by inches. Another Killing Curse forced Harry to retreat and move to the side. With few thoughts in his head, Harry chose to attack with everything he had.

Harry let loose with every violent spell he could think of. He was pouring his magic into each one and the Death Eater was diving away or throwing up a shield as often as the spells came. A few Crucio's and a Killing Curse later, Harry had to fight fire with fire. He limited himself to the Cruciatus Curse and continued fighting for his life. The minutes passed and the Death Eater was still fighting hard.

"She will be next, Boy. I will kill her after I am done playing with her first," said the robed figure. The voice sounded like Lucius Malfoy but Harry wasn't sure. "I will tear her heart out and watch her choke on it."

In his mind, Harry saw Tonks dying the way the man described. He didn't know how it happened, but he saw, heard, and felt Tonks dying before him. Scared, confused, and overwhelmed, Harry aimed his wand and unleashed a spell. He wanted to stop the Death Eater for good and never have him threaten Tonks' life again. He said the words and watched a vile, writhing, sickly-green jet of light erupt from his wand and strike the Death Eater in the chest.

The figure dropped to the ground limply and didn't move. Harry stared at the man for a second then scanned the field for any other attackers. He tried to summon anyone who was there, but no one appeared. The scene disappeared and the training room replaced it.

In a small group sat the other Unspeakables and a few were looking a little groggy as they wobbled in their seats. The others were motionless and Horace was standing off to the side. "You finally get Apparition down and manage to cast the Killing Curse too. Maybe you aren't so worthless after all."

Harry saw red at those words. He wanted to hurt Horace more than ever. He had just cast the Killing Curse on another and Horace acts like it was a normal day. Harry felt his magic writhing around inside of him and it wanted an outlet. Harry took a few steps towards Horace and raising his wand.

“Ceps,” a figure moved in front of Harry and it sounded like Tonks. “It was only a test and you did well. Nothing was real, nothing really happened except for the three you stunned and poor Michael with a broken shoulder. Calm down. I am fine. You are fine.”

“I cast the Killing Curse for the first time,” Harry said dangerously. “How should I be feeling? I wanted to kill the Death Eater and as far as I was concerned, I did. I am no better than him now. I am just like him. He told me I was just like him and now I proved him right. I am just as evil as he is.”

Tonks was shocked by what Harry had said. She grabbed his arm and pulled the unwilling teenager off to the side. She threw up a Privacy Dome and proceeded to question him. “What do you mean you are like him? You are nothing like him.”

“I wanted to kill and I would have done it. I was happy when I heard that guy scream from my spell.”

“Michael let his guard down because you are the new guy and he got himself hurt. They were there to curse you and beat you down. You did what you needed to do to survive. You only used the Killing Curse when Horace directed the room to threaten my life. I have seen people kill in battle before. The ones who enjoy it get a smile on their face. You didn’t smile at all. Your face became blank and I knew you weren’t thinking. You were reacting and that would have saved your life, Harry.

“No matter what happens, you fight to stay alive. We are at war. You know this better than anyone else and you have to stay alive. If you kill some Death Eater to stay alive, then you did the right thing. Never doubt that fact because they won’t. You can do whatever you need to do to stay alive if your life is threatened. I am proud of you for the fact that you survive when others want you dead not because you can kill someone. Now, calm down and let’s go back to the group.”

Tonks dropped the dome and pulled Harry over the group. They were talking amongst themselves until Harry and Tonks rejoined them. Marcus was at the back of the rows and nodded to Horace. Horace nodded in return and walked over to Harry.

“Rules of engagement and the Unspeakables, Ceps. Number one; you go home at the end of the day. Whatever you need to do to get there, you do it. Rule number two; your team goes home at the end of the day. They are second only to yourself. The mission is third in priority. Rule number three; if they use the Killing Curse, you use the Killing Curse. Do not hesitate. Make the bastards die for their own cause and you live for yours. Rule number four; always win. However you need to do that, find a way. As a team leader, you will need to figure out a way to win. Sometimes, winning is retreating. Rule one is staying alive. Being alive means you are still on the winning side. Dying means you lost. We don’t lose.”

Horace drew his wand and found himself staring down the shaft of Harry’s instantly. “Easy there, Ceps. We are on the same side even though I don’t act like it. Just an adjustment to your badge.”

Harry lowered his wand but kept the tip pointed at Horace. Horace tapped the badge and mumbled the words allowing him to change it. He worked a bit and stepped back. “Team three remains out of rotation until they are cleared by us. Begin working together next week, Three, I want you ready to go in less than a month.” Horace nodded to Harry, Tonks, and Cal before heading for the door.

Harry looked down and saw changes had been made to his badge. The top still had one pip, but there were two additional pips that were ghost images. He had the Roman numeral three in the black square marking him as a member of Tonks’ team. His bars had changed as well. He had six red instead of five. He gained one blue to reach five. His green and yellow remained at six and zero respectively, but purple gained one to stand at three. The black field had the largest increase. He had six bars were he had four previously.

Harry looked into Tonks’ face and shrugged his shoulders. She placed a hand on him and directed him to their team room which was in room number twelve. Once Cal entered the room, the door closed

and Tonks pulled off her hood. "Cal knows who I really am, Ceps. I trust him with my life and have done so for two years. You can make your own choice on whether or not you wish to tell him who you really are. Now, what questions do you have?"

"Tonks, what just happened out there?"

"Ceps, you showed Horace that you can do what needs done and you aren't going to get hung up by the rules. I knew you were going to do it sooner or later but you proved to him you can do it now. You fought off not only one Imperius Curse, but three of them from three of the best operatives we have. That alone got you one bar. If you can cast the spell, I am sure you will get the last one.

"You need to work on your speed with the Killing Curse too. You took too long getting to the point where you would use it. In our line of work if someone tries to kill you, you do not hesitate in killing them. We play for keeps and our lives are the main prize. You master those two spells, and you will be a seven. Just so you know, no one messes with a seven-black operative during a real mission.

"You used a wider variety of offensive and defensive spells. I doubt you realized that many of them were wandless too." Harry shook his head. "I figured as much. All of your shields were wandless and you were firing spells at the same time. That is the reason you got another red and blue bar. You are within reach of three sevens and you are only in your third day. I knew you could do all this, but you just needed the proper motivation."

"Motivation?"

"If they hadn't attacked you, would you have been able to fight like that? You train fine, but you excel when you are fighting for real or at least when you think it is real. Like I have said before, you don't think, you just do. You are going to be our team leader once we figure out how to work together."

"What? I am the new guy. One of you should lead."

"Nope," Cal interjected. "I am support, plain and simple. I can't lead a team. Chamel is not a leader either. She works better from the

sidelines. You, my boy, are the real deal. You jump up and charge ahead. We can hold you back when we need to, but we can't force you to the front. You have the ability and drive to lead. That is why you are the soon-to-be three-pip."

"But I don't know anything."

"Maybe not," Cal said smiling, "But you sure fake it well. Well enough that I will follow you. Now if you don't mind, I am looking forward to the rest of my Friday off. Cheers, teammates." Cal turned and left the room closing the door behind him.

"He is an idiot to follow me anywhere," Harry said out loud.

"Then I am an idiot as well," Tonks said jokingly. "I will follow you, Harry, because that is what you bring out of people. You are a natural leader. People listen to you."

"No one has ever listened to me. The Dursley's, Dumbledore, hell most of the school didn't believe me. Only Hermione believed that didn't enter myself into the Tri-wizard tournament just to name one time someone listened to me."

"I didn't know you then, but I would have believed you." Tonks leaned forward and kissed Harry on the lips forcefully. She let the kiss progress until she started getting too warm. "Now, I think we should enjoy our day and get you some clothes. I am not going to keep you locked up in the Dursleys' on the weekends. We are going to have fun like a teenager should."

"But you aren't a teenager, Nymphadora."

"True, but I act like one often enough that I still count as one." She stuck her tongue out as she sprung up from her position and pulled Harry to his feet. She looked at him and removed her cloak. Harry's eyes widened as he saw that she was wearing a very tight, pink tank top and nicely fitting muggle pants. "We will Apparate from here to the Apparition spot in Diagon Alley. You know where that is, right?"

Harry forced himself to concentrate on the question and not on Tonks. "I know where the spot is, but I don't know if I can Apparate there."

“Sure you can, Harry. Just do it and join me.” She watched the doubt on Harry’s face. “If you get there in one piece, I promise you a long kiss later.”

Harry managed to regain some control of his mind. “Only one kiss?”

“Considering how every other kiss between us turns into a soft-core porno, I am sure you will get more than just one kiss out of the arrangement. Now dump the cloak and let’s go.”

Harry followed Tonks lead and put his Unspeakable cloak in the trunk, reshrank it, and placed it in his pocket. Tonks looked him up and down with an exacting eye. “You need clothes desperately. It is about time you leave the rest of the Dursley era behind you.”

“Whatever. I have no clue what to do about clothes. I will just have to follow your advice, but before you go all crazy I am not into wild colors for myself. They work for you, but I stand out enough as is without showing off.”

“Spoil-sport,” Tonks chided and stuck her tongue out at him. “To Diagon Alley for money, clothes, and a little bit of trouble if we are lucky.” She disappeared with a softer crack.

‘Here we go.’ Harry said and willed himself to the Apparition point. After a few seconds of trying he felt the pressing sensation and saw that he had, indeed, appeared in Diagon Alley. A warm hand briefly rubbed the back of his neck as he saw Tonks behind him.

“Good job appearing quietly and facing away from the alley. I don’t think anyone noticed you arrive. Now, we should go to Gringotts so I can get some money to pay for your clothes.”

“I have money, Nymphadora. You don’t have to pay for me.”

“Well, I don’t know how much you have so we will go to yours first and then I can take out however much more I think we will need. This is a treat of mine so don’t you ruin it, young man.” Tonks was trying to be serious but the smirk gave her away. “I am in a playful mood right now so you will just have to pretend that I was being stern with you.”

“Whatever you say, Nymphadora,” Harry said softly earning a smile and puckered lips.

“I will keep my promise, but not here. We are a little too public even for my tastes. Now let’s get moving before the shops start closing.”

“Ah, the shops don’t close until at least five o’clock, right?” Harry asked.

“Correct,” Tonks said pulling Harry down the mostly empty street.

“It is around noon, right?”

“Right again, Harry. Do you need a watch too?”

“Actually, I do, but why would we need to be concerned about the shops closing when we have at least five hours before we need to start worrying?”

“Oh, it will take us at least that long to get our shopping done, Harry. You need a full wardrobe.” Harry swallowed nervously and looked for an escape route. The effort caught Tonks eye. “Oh no you don’t. No running away from me. You are in this until the end. It is only shopping. You like shopping.”

“I think you have me confused with a girl, Nymphadora,” Harry said in a deadpanned tone. “I get what I need then leave. I have never been shopping for myself outside of when Hagrid took me before my first year and Molly for my second.”

“Well, then it is about time you bought yourself something nice isn’t it?” Tonks replied undaunted. Harry had kept his eyes fixed on his minder as she drug him through the alley to the bank. Only when she started up the steps did Harry realize they were at the bank already. A quick look behind him showed the mostly empty alley had missed the fact that Harry Potter had come to visit.

The doors opened and they entered the lobby. More people were in the bank than walking around the alley. A few lines had formed and Tonks went to stand in the shortest one. Harry followed her and stood

next to her for a few minutes trying to be as inconspicuous as possible while standing next to a person wearing a bright pink shirt.

Harry heard the sound of footsteps coming from behind him so he turned to look in that direction. He saw a familiar goblin, Griphook, carrying an official letter in his long fingers. When Harry decided Griphook was walking towards him, Harry nudged Tonks in the side.

"Hello, Griphook," Harry said to the shocked goblin.

"You remember me, Mr. Potter?"

"Yes, you were really the first goblin that I had ever met. Why wouldn't I remember you?"

"You are a human, Mr. Potter," Griphook said as if everything was explained. "Doesn't that answer your question?"

"Not really, but I am used to that by now." Harry did his best to restrain his displeasure from showing itself.

"Mr. Potter, I have a letter for you from Director Ragnok. If you have any business to conduct, please approach the head teller station for service." Griphook bowed his head slightly and walked to the rear of the bank disappearing behind a gilded door.

Harry looked at the envelope before breaking the Gringotts' seal and opening it. He pulled the letter out and read the formal and fancy writing. Harry's mood dropped instantly and Tonks took notice of it. She leaned over his shoulder and saw enough to understand what the letter was about.

Harry finished reading and folded up the note. He returned it to the envelope and sighed. "I don't want any of it. I just want him back."

"I know, Harry, but we both know that isn't going to happen. Take whatever he wanted to give you and enjoy it. Spend the money on stupid things and wreak havoc with the other things. That is what Sirius would have wanted. Now, on with our day. We might as well take advantage of the perks of you being you and get helped right now."

Tonks directed Harry to the head teller station drawing the attention of a few people in the other lines. Harry stowed his letter and looked up at the goblin staring down at him. The goblin looked older than Griphook and he had white hair protruding from his ears. His expression never changed as he kept his eyes on Harry and Harry alone.

"I would like to go to my vault, sir," Harry said handing the goblin his key.

The goblin looked the key over with an exacting eye. "Of course, Mr. Potter. Does your lady friend have any business with us today?"

"I may, but it depends on how much Harry has in his vault. He is going shopping and he is doing it right this time." Tonks kept the smile on her face as the goblin checked a ledger.

"Unless Mr. Potter is shopping for a moderately-sized estate, I am sure you will not need to assist him with your own money." The goblin pressed a button and the rear doors opened and Griphook returned to the lobby. "Griphook will assist you in your business today, Mr. Potter. Good day to you."

Harry followed Griphook into the rear of the bank and to an awaiting cart. Tonks joined them on the neck-breaking ride into the bowels on the bank. Harry sat quietly as Tonks whooped beside him. On one sharp turn, Tonks leaned over and gave Harry a very tongue-filled kiss trying to break his dismal mood. For the first time since he received the letter, Harry smiled.

"That one doesn't count, does it?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Nah, that one was a freebie, Harry."

They arrived at vault number 687. Harry handed his key over to Griphook and the goblin opened the vault. When the door swung open, Harry entered and started throwing galleons into his money pouch. Tonks stayed out of the vault but looked inside.

"No shit I don't need to use my own money. You are loaded Harry. Not even out of school and you have more money than most of the

Wizarding populous. If you want to buy me a Christmas present, I like Witch's Wear Unmentionables. A gift certificate is more than fine for me."

"I will remember that, Nymphadora." Once Harry had filled his bag with numerous coins, he left the vault and got back into the cart. With the vault sealed and secured, the goblin directed the cart to the surface. Harry joined Tonks in expressing his enjoyment on the return trip.

Once the cart had stopped at the return point, Harry offered Tonks his hand helping her out of the cart. When they neared the door, Harry counted out ten galleons and handed them to Griphook.

"Thank you, Griphook, and whatever happened down there never really happened, right?"

"Mr. Potter," Griphook stated offering the coins back. "All business inside the walls of Gringotts is kept in the strictest of confidence. Anything else occurred while business was in-process."

Harry merely smiled and said, "All the same, thank you." Harry turned and walked through the opening door accompanied by a confused Tonks.

"Harry, why did you give him money?"

"If I have so much of it, then I plan on keeping my dealings as secret as possible. It was only ten galleons and if that keeps certain people from finding out we were here together then it is more than worth it."

"We aren't exactly being secret walking around Diagon Alley like this. Certain people are bound to find out sooner or later." They walked down the steps and Tonks led them to Madam Malkin's.

"True, but I am sure Dumbledore has some leverage with the goblins. This way, at least the finer points are kept hidden from others."

"Look at you," Tonks said giving Harry a fake admiring gaze. "You get a taste of cloak and dagger, literally, and you get all Slytherin on me. My little boy is growing up so fast." Tonks wiped away a fake tear with

her hand. Harry grimaced for the first time in what would be his most common expression for the next four hours.

The hours rolled by very slowly for Harry. Once Tonks grabbed Madam Malkin, herself, she had them all sequestered in a side room. Tonks brought outfits by the armload for Harry to try on. He kept his humor about him for about forty-five minutes, then he became agitated. Tonks was unabashed in her efforts to clothe him. The agitation gave way to apathy at the hour-and-a-half mark. The remainder of the time Harry put on what he was told to and didn't say one word.

He turned when asked, he stretched when ordered, he even put on the same things multiple times when begged to by a very pathetic-looking metamorph. On Harry's hundredth or so vocal sigh, Tonks finally relented.

"Fine, Harry, you are done. You hung in there while I played dress-up with you. You might as well put on a new outfit for the rest of the day so we can burn those rags you are wearing." Harry grabbed a pair of jeans and a white t-shirt and entered the changing room which had become a new home for him in the last few hours.

"Are you sure you don't want to wear a pair of new slacks and a dress shirt?" Tonks asked receiving a snort in return. "Hey, you look sexy in them." Another snort could be heard from the isolated room. "Fine, look like a normal teenager then. See if I care."

Harry dressed and sat down to slip on his new trainers. The boots he had worn had been put in his work trunk along with all of the other clothes he had purchased. The tags had been removed by Madam Malkin as he, or rather Tonks, had decided they were good. Shoe strings tied, Harry relaxed for a second and assessed the day.

'I learn to Apparate, I try to kill someone, I get in another fight that ends up being another test, I am the next leader of team three, I have new clothes, and I have to be at Gringotts tomorrow to hear Sirius's will; not terrible, but not the best day I have ever had.' Harry left his sanctuary and returned to the madness of the small room they had been using.

Tonks wasn't there. Madam Malkin wasn't there. The door to the small room had been closed and he was all alone. Harry figured something wasn't right. He drew his wand from the hidden pocket in the side of his jeans that Madam Malkin had added for free because of the large purchase. Harry lowered himself into a defensive position and scanned the room which had a few rows of clothes that had yet to be altered or finished.

Harry waited for something to happen. He heard a very soft sound from the other changing room next to the one he had just left. He slid to the side of the door, against the wall, and took a deep breath. He prepared to open the door and stun the occupant if needed. In one swift motion, he pulled the door open, crouched, and moved to get a good shot off. What he saw stopped him as dead as the Killing Curse could.

Tonks turned away from the mirror she was posing in front of and looked Harry in the eyes. "Did I miss something, Harry? Did you get in another fight and I missed it?" Tonks was smiling widely as she watched Harry's reaction to the view. She saw the blush rise from his neck and reach his cheeks. Once his ears turned red, she broke the silence. "Do you like it? I was thinking of getting it for a special occasion."

Harry could only stare at the woman in front of him. Tonks was her normal self; brown hair, shapely legs, and large breasts. Her clothing wasn't the sexy little tank top and pants she had worn to the alley, but a short, very silky, light blue nightie that was form fitting in all the right places. Harry managed to keep a hold of his wand, but he failed at controlling other things.

Tonks playful smile shifted to a sultrier smirk, and she reached out her arm to lightly touch Harry's chest. "Do you like it, Harry?" Tonks asked in a low seductive voice. She watched Harry fighting to form the words he wished to say. After a few moments, he spoke slowly.

"It is a bit of alright, Nymphadora. What, ah, special occasion were you thinking of?" Harry swallowed and tried to move his eyes up to look Tonks in the face.

“You know, just a special occasion. They happen all the time.” Tonks waited to see if Harry was going to do anything else. Surprised by his restraint, Tonks continued with her tease. “So, it is just a bit of alright? Damn, I was hoping for more than that like a ‘very pretty’ or ‘sexy’ or maybe even a ‘damn hot’.”

“I think it is safe to say you achieved all of those and then some, Nymphadora.” Harry took a deep breath and managed to get his brain working again. He figured out her trick. “You are just teasing me, aren’t you?”

“As you have seen for yourself, Harry, I tease at the beginning but then I fall apart. Normally, this would be the one and only time I would let a guy see this, but I just have a feeling that you will see again and probably quite a bit more. I still owe you a kiss for today and I think I will give you another for how good you were for letting me pick out your clothes. Now, if you can let me change I think you will need a few minutes to compose yourself.”

Harry nodded slowly and closed the door to the dressing room. He sat in a chair just outside the room and put his head in hands. He used what little Occlumency he had to regain control over his body and mind.

Leaning back, Harry said aloud, “Sorry about that, Nymphadora. I just came out of the room and everyone was gone so I kind of overreacted. I thought something had happened to you and Madam Malkin.”

“No worries, Harry,” Tonks answered. “It was fun all the same. You have seen me in my underwear and a t-shirt so this wasn’t much different. Besides, I am glad that you approved of it so much.” Tonks giggled when she heard Harry groan in embarrassment.

The door opened again and a fully clothed Tonks emerged. She had the nightie in one hand and the tag in her other. She held it out to Harry, and after a few unspoken head nods, he put it in trunk with the rest of his new clothes.

Once they emerged from the back room, they went to the counter where the rest of Harry’s tags had been tallied up. He grabbed the

tag out of Tonks' hand and dropped it onto the pile. Tonks tried to complain, but Harry raised his hand forestalling her objection. "A Christmas present."

"But Christmas isn't for months."

"Then a birthday present." Harry didn't know why she was being such a pain about this. It wasn't like the few extra galleons were going to matter when he had a full wardrobe to pay for.

"My birthday was a couple months ago, Harry. I can pay for this myself."

"A belated birthday present then. Merlin, you just can't smile and accept the gift can you."

"Alright, Harry, I will accept the gift from you on one condition, you let me buy dinner."

Harry thought it over and decided that he won out either way. "I accept your terms, Tonks. Where are we going to go then?"

"How about a restaurant here? Have you ever been to one before?"

"If you don't count Florean's, then no."

Tonks smiled and listed a place Harry had never heard of. With a shrug of his shoulders, Harry agreed to where ever she wanted. The whole time Madam Malkin had rechecked the total and was waiting for Harry to pay. A glance at the till and Harry opened his money bag. He poured out a pile of coins and quickly counted out the required amount and threw in a few more. With an off-handed comment that he hadn't been there at all, Harry turned to leave the store with Tonks following in his wake.

The pair reemerged into the alley and found more people moving about but most kept their heads down and their feet moving. Harry allowed Tonks to assume the lead and she aimed him back towards the bank. When they passed Weasley's Wizard Wheezes, Fred was adjusting a multicolored sign announcing a new product for sale. Harry thought of hiding, but when he turned toward Tonks he knew

that would be impossible. The pink shirt prevented her from hiding anywhere but Hogsmeade during Valentine's Day.

Harry counted the seconds until Fred turned around and saw them. He got to six before Fred saw the pair. He only held in his shout when Harry moved forward and shushed him. "Harry, Tonks, what are you doing here? Mum would go spare if she knew you weren't locked away, erm, protected at that prison, erm, house of your relatives."

"We are enjoying a day of shopping, Weasley twin number one," Tonks answered. "I am Harry's guard and I guard him where ever he happens to be. He just happens to be here right now so there you go."

"Twin number one, huh?" Fred asked.

"Well, there is only one of you here right now, so yeah, number one works just fine."

"Fred, please don't tell anyone I was here today. I really don't need the hassle you know," Harry begged.

"No worries, mate," Fred dismissed Harry's concerns. "I completely understand. Besides, would I be the type of person who would squeal on someone doing something they weren't supposed to? Honestly, I thought you knew me better than that." Fred hung his shaking head in shame. "You spend five years teaching these kids right from wrong and what do you get? I am disappointed, Harry. Ron I could understand not having much of a clue, but you were always the smart one of the group. I guess Ginny is the last hope for the Weasley family."

"Hermione is the smart one, I just get lucky," Harry replied.

"Books not make one smart, Harry. Hermione plays by the rules so much I swear if it wasn't for you she would already have a job with the Ministry oppressing everyone with more rules. Tonks, please save this lost soul from the straight and narrow." Fred dropped to his knees and clasped his hand together pleading with Tonks.

"You are making a scene you git," Harry snapped while scanning the street. "I do not want to be seen and you pull this in the middle of Diagon Alley."

Fred jumped up and smiled widely. "No worries, mate. After the first few days, most of the alley ignores what we do over here. Anyway, I have something for you that we were going to post." Fred dug into his vest pocket and pulled out a Gringotts' key. "Number 1969, and yes we asked for that number. This is where your share is being deposited."

"Share, what share?" Tonks asked becoming giddy again at the prospect of learning some secret.

"Harry's share of the profits, of course." Fred didn't hesitate in answering the question.

"I don't want a share. That money was a gift and if you want to give it away then give it to your family. I don't want it."

"Come now Harry," Fred explained. "We are already helping out the family, but your half is still your half."

"Half!" Harry yelled.

"Now who is making the scene?" Fred quipped putting his hand on Harry's shoulder. "We voted on it and you get half."

"I never voted," Harry said crossing his arms.

"Yes, well, you didn't make the owners meeting that day so you were a default 'yes' vote. Besides, it was a unanimous vote for you getting half."

"Bloody Weasleys," Harry mumbled under his breath.

"Not today, but yesterday for sure," countered Fred. "Finally figured out what was wrong with that candy. Nearly lost Lee in the testing phase. Anyway, you should stop by when you have time and can be seen by others, Harry. You kids have fun." Fred wiggled his eyebrows and Harry and Tonks as he ushered them away.

“Fred will keep his mouth shut and not say a word,” Harry repeated to himself over and over.

“What is the big deal, Harry?” Tonks asked innocently. “Don’t want to be seen with me?”

“No, it is the fact that if Dumbledore or even Molly hears about this they will lock me away for ‘my own protection’.”

“Think nothing of it, Harry, I will be the one getting yelled at for letting you out. I am the guard after all. Besides,” Tonks said with a giggle. “Dung’s shift started twenty minutes ago.” Tonks proceeded to laugh at the situation.

Harry tried to stay worried, but with Tonks laughing the way she was he couldn’t do it. Finally a smile broke out on his face and Harry couldn’t keep the chuckle inside. They walked down the alley and turned the corner that Tonks pointed out. They continued past some clubs and other nightspots that Harry thought looked pretty interesting from the outside.

Tonks pulled his arm toward a darker lit building covered in old-looking wood. There was a name plate near the doorway, but you could only read the words from a certain angle and Harry only saw curly letters before he was pulled inside. The entrance way was adorned in the same wood as outside and had marble floors. Harry’s only thought was that this was an expensive place.

A man met them right inside the door and he was already looking down his nose at them. “May I help you?”

Harry knew they weren’t wanted judging by the man’s reaction. Harry looked at his clothes and figured the t-shirt was definitely a reason for that. Harry saw the look the man was giving Tonks in her pink tank top and it wasn’t pleasant.

“Yes, you can help us,” Harry said directly to the man. “I would like a table, away from the crowd.” The man shifted his disapproving glare from Tonks, who was looking around oblivious to the situation, to Harry.

He looked ready to make a comment, but paused as the dim light caught the scar on Harry's forehead. The man stepped back and seemed to change his demeanor instantly. "Right this way, sir."

"I thought so," Harry said exposing his contempt for the man. *'If Tonks wants to eat here, then we eat here and this guy isn't going to ruin it.'*

They walked deeper into the restaurant and turned a corner coming to a door marked 'VIP'. Harry noticed the stares they received when they walked past the occupied tables. He kept his eyes on Tonks hoping that she wouldn't notice how unwelcome they seemed to be. The man opened the door and led them into the even better furnished room.

Harry followed the man to the booth he had chosen and let Tonks take her seat first. Harry slid into the opposite side and waited to see what would happen. The man produced leather-bound menus and a wine list before bowing low and retreating from the room. Harry opened the menu and scanned the items available for selection. The one thing he noticed immediately was the lack of prices on the menus. In his time at the Dursleys, he knew what that meant, expensive.

Harry looked up and found Tonks gazing into his eyes wearing an excited expression. "Thank you for taking care of the idiot, Harry. I know he was about to chuck us out, but you came through like I knew you would."

"What?"

"Look at this place, Harry. Like they would let me in wearing this and in the VIP section no less. That was all you, baby."

"I didn't do anything, Nymphadora."

"You were there and knew we were about to be tossed. You flashed your scar and here we are. I know you hate to use it, but you have it so..."

"I might as well make you happy and show it off."

“Exactly, Harry. Who said you didn’t know how to treat a lady?”

“Hermione, forth year. Parvati, forth year as well. I think Cho last year come to think of it.”

“Well, you learn fast, Harry. Thank you. I have always wanted to eat here and you made the happen.”

“This place is expensive isn’t?” Harry asked knowing the answer.

“Yep, but it is worth it. It is my treat anyway so don’t worry.”

“I can help if you want. I still have some money left over after buying out Madam Malkin’s.”

“I got it, Harry. I am an auror you know.” Tonks winked and picked up her menu.

Harry looked over the menu and decided he wanted a steak to eat. Without prices, he didn’t know what was the cheapest. Many of the selections had foreign names so he had no idea what they were. He closed his menu and watched Tonks nibbling on her tongue as she decided what to order. Harry had to look away since he started getting ideas in his head.

“Know what you want, Harry?” Tonks asked gaining his attention again.

Harry took control of the dirty thoughts raging in his mind. “I was thinking of the steak since I can understand what that is. How about you?”

“Same. Want some wine with our meal?” Tonks didn’t wait for his answer and opened the wine list and started listing off red wines. Harry watched the scene with an amused smile on his face. She was always ready to jump forward and enjoy her life. After a few minutes, Harry watched a waitress enter the room. She carried herself with poise and perfection on every step. She stood before their table and watch Tonks scanning the wine list.

“Do you wish to select a wine off the house list or do you want one from your collection here, Mr. Potter?”

“Excuse me?” Harry answered bluntly.

“Your family, I believe your grandfather, was a frequent guest here and he kept an assortment of his preferred wine in our cellars as best as I can recall. I can check with a house elf if you would like to confirm our current stock.”

“Sure, that sounds fine,” Harry answered but he was obviously confused.

The waitress disappeared through a rear door. Tonks looked at Harry and smiled happily. “You have your own wine here? How cool. I wonder what you have got to chose from.”

“I have no idea, but considering my grandfather has been dead for at least sixteen years I guess they should be pretty old.”

The idle banter continued until the waitress returned. She had a slip of paper in her hand and asked what they wanted to order. Harry ordered the steak, medium, as did Tonks.

“Very good, so that means you will want a red. I have a wide selection here so if I may make a suggestion, the 1956 Mouton Rothschild should do nicely. Does that meet with your expectations?”

Harry hesitated before agreeing with the choice. The waitress left the room quietly. Tonks watched Harry carefully. “You ordered a 1956 bottle of wine for our dinner. This is going to be an amazing dinner, Harry. Thank you.”

“There is so much I don’t know about my family. When I get time, I want to read those files about them. No one has ever mentioned my grandparents before.”

Harry and Tonks talked about her family and what she did as a child. Harry learned that she had always been different while growing up. She learned of her abilities when she was six and from that point on she had worked to develop and control them. Harry felt sympathy for

her when she described how the other kids at Hogwarts had treated her during her first three years of school.

They had always asked her to change her appearance or become someone else for a joke. She could only name two people who had wanted to know the real Nymphadora Tonks. Harry couldn't help but agree with her disdain for everyone else. The wine and steak had arrived and after a glass and a half of the very old wine, Harry was feeling a little lightheaded. Tonks was altering her features every other minute trying to entertain him. When the bill arrived, Harry tried to pay it while Tonks was busy fixing her pointed ears.

"I said I would pay it, Harry. Put your money away this instant." Tonks grabbed the check and signed her name and vault number on the slip. "With you supplying the wine, the bill wasn't too bad. Thanks for that."

"I had no clue about the wine. So what do we do with the rest of it?"

"Bring it with. We can't let it go to waste. Maybe the Dursleys will be jealous when they see it. Considering how they are, I can almost guarantee they won't know what to do when they see that bottle. It probably costs as much as that great arse makes in a week. Well, almost maybe. Let's go."

Tonks and Harry stood up to leave the restaurant after Harry had deposited the wine in his trunk. Tonks was walking very close to Harry as they passed the entryway. The man bowed deeply as Harry neared him. Tonks laughed, but Harry came to a stop in front of him.

"I suggest you treat people, especially friends of mine, better than you did today." Harry held the man's eyes for a few seconds before turning to leave. Harry placed his hand on Tonks' lower back and urged her on. She complied instantly and led the way out of the establishment.

"You didn't need to do that, Harry," Tonks said quietly but in an overly friendly way. "You always need to be the hero, don't you?"

"Nymphadora, he judged you because of what you were wearing. That isn't right and I should know considering what I wore until you made me buy new stuff. I am not interested in places that treat

people like that. It is the same prejudice that Voldemort uses. Pureblood or you are worthless. Just because that guy isn't murdering people doesn't make his actions okay. You are my friend and I will do what I can to make you happy."

Tonks pulled Harry to a stop to the side of the alley amongst the shadows and moved into Harry. She gripped his head and kissed him firmly. Harry gave into the effort without a fight. As his head swirled a little from the wine, his mind went blank except for kissing the woman in front of him. They snogged for a few minutes until Tonks pulled away breathing heavily. "Make a portkey to your room. Apparating after drinking is not for novices."

Harry pulled out his wand and the metal ring he had used for training. He concentrated extra hard and tapped the ring. It reacted properly and Harry held it out for Tonks to grab onto. She grabbed the ring and kissed Harry firmly again. Harry felt the tug and once he pulled away for some air he saw that they were standing in his room.

Tonks opened her eyes and dropped the ring to the floor noisily and pushed Harry backwards on to the bed. She followed him down and pulled herself along his body up to his lips. She continued kissing him as she slowly pulled up on his shirt exposing his chest. She started kissing his newly revealed skin eliciting a pleasant sound from his throat. She thought she was in control for once until Harry's hands found their way to her butt and subsequently tugged her own shirt over her head. She was lying on top of Harry wearing her bra and pants as his hands started roaming around her soft skin.

She made a few sounds of her own as Harry moved her mouth back to his. They snogged for a while and Tonks managed to even the odds a little by removing Harry's shirt completely and getting his pants undone before there was a knock at the door. Harry growled as Tonks slid off of him and the bed. She gathered her clothes and quickly put on her shirt while Harry did the same and fastened his jeans.

Harry checked the room once before opening the door. He saw Dudley on the other side staring at him. "What do you want?" Harry

asked slowly using everything he had to intimidate Dudley into leaving.

"I can hear you again," Dudley said quietly trying to steal a look into the room. "Mum and Dad will be up soon. You wouldn't want them to hear you shagging your girlfriend would you?"

"If you could keep your eyes to yourself for a second, I can tell you I couldn't care less whether they heard us doing anything. I have said it before and I will say it again; they have nothing to say about what I do. They never did, but I am taking control of my life now. I would hate to see Vernon bust in here and try something. He could get hurt, you know. Terrible shame that would be, wouldn't it?"

Tonks took this moment to swing around the door and step into the view of Dudley. She had messed up hair and her shirt was very rumpled. She slid her left hand onto Harry's shoulder and her right wound around his stomach caressing it softly. She put on her most sexy smile and spoke very enticingly.

"Harry, why don't you close the door so we can get back to what we were doing. I am a little cold and I think you should help me warm up a bit. You are good at that, remember?" Tonks looked away from Harry and wiggled her eyebrows at Dudley for a second before looking at Harry again.

Dudley stood dumfounded in the doorway as Tonks continued to rub her hand around Harry's body. Harry was beginning to respond to Tonks' touches and his focus was beginning to shift away from Dudley.

"Dud, why don't you go somewhere else. Somewhere that isn't in front of my door. I am rather busy right now." Harry had trouble forming sentences but he managed the best he could. Dudley said nothing, so Harry absentmindedly pushed the door closed. Once it clicked closed, Tonks threw up a Silencing Charm and broke into laughter.

Harry took a moment to realize what had happened before he too started to laugh. "It may have been fun to get him like that, but I feel

the price was a little too high for me.” Harry looked like a wounded puppy and Tonks laughter broke instantly.

She watched him for a second then grabbed him and kissed him firmly on the lips again. Her hands worked his hair into sticking up even worse than normal. She moved him back to the bed and straddled him as he lay down. She started moving her lower torso around his getting the reaction she wanted.

“For once I know what I am doing,” Tonks said between kisses.

“I am still clueless, but what are you going to do?” Harry asked.

“I am going to play for a while and then I am going to stop and drive you absolutely crazy.” Tonks smiled widely as she continued her ministrations.

Harry let her continue for a few minutes before he stared into her dark eyes. “Nymphadora, I don’t want to be driven crazy.” Harry waited until she looked at him before willing his mind into hers. She responded with a moan and her eyes fluttered shut.

“Damn you, Harry,” Tonks said so quietly Harry had to strain to hear it.

“Maybe, Nymph, maybe.” Harry pulled her lips to his and kissed her until his lack of air forced him to break it. She panted along with him and shivered slightly. She opened her eyes and all Harry saw was hunger and desire in them. He started pulling her shirt off again, but she yanked it over her head and tossed it over her shoulder. She pulled on his shirt a bit roughly so he helped her remove it.

Harry made eye contact again and willed the connection to happen. He watched anxiously as Tonks tried to inhale his mouth with hers. She was kissing and probing his mouth with her tongue. She kept rubbing Harry with her body stimulating him with every movement. As they continued, Harry felt a tremor in Tonks body so he opened his eyes finding the real Tonks sitting on him. All alterations gone, Tonks kept running her hands over his body and head.

With a moan, she lowered herself to lie next to Harry. She kept her eyes closed but her mouth was open trying to breathe. “Harry, I have

to stop before this goes too far. You have no idea how close I am to vanishing our clothes and fucking your brains out. I can't open my eyes or I will do just that. I am sorry, but you get me going too much and way too fast. Oh, what a talent."

"So, um, what now then?"

"Harry, I am supposed to be looking out for you. I feel like I am betraying some oath or something here. I know what is expected of me but I know what I want to do. Those things are at odds here. I can't do both."

"Everyone has expectations of me. Most of them involve me saving them from Voldemort. For the first time in my life, I am doing what I want to do. I am making decisions and dealing with the consequences. Right now, I couldn't care less about what others want from me."

Harry put his right hand under Tonks' chin and moved it up so he could kiss her. She didn't resist and gave in to his efforts quickly. They proceeded to kiss at Harry's pace until a hoot from Hedwig ruined the moment. Harry looked at the owl and saw that she had a letter for him. With a sigh, Harry extracted himself from Tonks warm partially clothed body and took the letter from Hedwig.

The letter was from Remus and Harry sat back on the bed. He slowly opened the letter and read what was written. Without turning around, Harry spoke to Tonks who was moving around behind him.

"Remus is wondering if he has to pick me up tomorrow so we can go to the will reading. Should I take him up on the offer? I just have to write him back and say yes."

"Nah, I can take you, Harry. When is it?"

"Ten o'clock is the reading. So, we should get there a little early. Remus says that Dumbledore will be there too since he got a letter from Gringotts. That is not what I want right now. I haven't worked on my Occlumency much. Just when it comes to..."

“Yes, Harry? You faded out there at the end. When it comes to what?”

Harry turned and saw Tonks standing on the other side of the bed wearing only her bra and panties. She gave him an impish smile and bounced on her feet a few times. Harry swallowed and took a breath.

“Exactly,” Harry said unable to force his eyes away from Tonks mostly naked body which was bathed in the moon light from outside. Harry managed to make eye contact with Tonks and waited for her to say something in response. She continued to smile and put her pink shirt back on. Harry watched as she put her arms in the shirt and moved about inside of it.

When her arms emerged, Tonks had a hold of her bra strap and tossed it at Harry hitting him in the chest. Harry saw her nipples pushing on the fabric from underneath and she smiled even wider. “Just so you know, that always happens when I take off my bra.”

“Are you trying to test my Occlumency skills here or just teasing again?”

“Which would you prefer, Harry?”

“I am not going to tell you which I would prefer, Nymphadora. I could get into trouble doing that.”

“I doubt you would get into trouble, Harry. You might find that you get what you want and more.”

Harry forced his eyes to her face and found humor, lust, and eagerness there. “Promises, promises,” Harry said softly.

Tonks pulled up the sheet and slid into the bed leaving her leg hanging out from under the sheet. “Are you going to join me, Harry?”

Taking a deep breath, Harry removed his pants and joined her under the sheets. Harry moved close to her and lay down. Tonks moved close to him smiling. “We can work on your Occlumency tomorrow before we leave. Right now, we should get some rest.” Tonks kissed him quickly on the nose and rolled over.

Harry couldn't think for a second before he grabbed her sides and tickled her. "You are the biggest flirt and tease I know, Nymph. I am going to tickle you until you apologize."

Tonks was laughing and writhing around on the bed violently. She kept fighting off Harry's hands but the effort wasn't much. Harry continued until he saw Tonks fighting to breathe. Once he stopped, Tonks started taking deep breaths between residual giggles.

When she had regained some composure, she turned over and enveloped Harry into a hug and gave him a deep searching kiss. "That is the playfulness I want to see more of from you, Harry. Just so you know, I am always in the mood to wrestle around and play touchy-feely." Tonks became serious and lowered her voice. "You are fun to be with and you always seem to know what to do at the right moment. Keep it up and you never know what you will get. Oh, and I apologize for my behavior earlier."

"Don't worry about it, Nymphadora." Harry leaned forward and kissed Tonks like he meant to. They continued until sleep took them.

6. Of History And Wills

The sun was at least a half hour away from rising, but Nymphadora Tonks was waking up. She was still slowly fighting her way out of sleep's grasp when she heard the sound of paper being shifted about. She opened her eyes and felt the sting of light in them. With her eyes closed, she remembered the previous night and everything that happened.

'Oh, that is going to leave a mark isn't it?' Tonks moved the sheet a little, blocking the light, and looked down at her stomach near her belly button. She saw a bruise had formed over night and knew that her neck was going to be just as bad or worse. *'It was worth every minute. He is too much fun for me. Thank Merlin he had enough self-control to stop me when I tried to...do not think about that. It will only end up happening again and that is not what you want...or do you?'*

Tonks used her metamorph abilities to hide the marks. *'I don't want him to worry about hurting me this early in the morning. Merlin knows he would too. He has too big a heart for his own good.'* Tonks found she could lower the sheet without her eyes screaming in pain from the light. She looked and saw Harry sitting on the floor leaning against the bed. She saw his messy black hair move around as he continued with what he was doing.

"Harry, what are you doing?"

Harry didn't answer, but Tonks felt a surge of magic flood her senses. She felt like she was drowning in it. It was worse than when Harry was in fights with Horace or Vernon. "Harry!" Tonks scrambled out of the bed and to the floor in front of Harry. She found him sitting cross-legged with a box sitting open to his right and a pile of papers and folders to his left.

One folder was open, in his hands, and he looked like he was reading the contents. "Harry, you are scaring me. Why are you so mad?"

Tonks moved back as Harry's eyes rose to look at her. A look of pure malevolence was shining in his eyes. Tonks had never seen Harry look that dangerous before. She never thought it was possible for a

fifteen-year-old to look that scary. She hesitantly asked the question again. "What is wrong, Harry?"

"There is so much they never told me." The hate was rolling off him in waves mixed with the raw magic he possessed. "I have been lied to. I have been kept in the dark. I have been ignored. I have been prevented from knowing who I really am. I want to hurt people right now and that scares me."

Tonks watched the fierceness on Harry's face swirl with fear and eagerness. She needed to know more if she had any hope of stopping something from being destroyed. Tonks only hoped that she and Harry weren't the ones who got hurt.

"Harry, please explain it too me. I do not know what is in those files. I read mine, but we weren't allowed to read others unless it is part of a mission. Tell me, please. Maybe I can help."

Harry fought the all-consuming urge to level the Dursley's home. He fought with his own magic which was screaming to be used. He took a few controlling breaths before answering the very frightened woman in front of him.

"My grandparents died of a wizarding disease and old age. Did you know that? My other grandparents died from a car accident. What harm would it have caused to tell me that? Why do I have to find this shit out for myself? Why can't people just tell me these things?"

"Is that why you are so mad?" Tonks asked cautiously.

"Not even close. I learned that my father didn't have a job because he managed my family's investments. Apparently, the Potter's have a stake in many businesses in both the wizard and muggle worlds. My mum was employed but it doesn't say where. She did something, but I haven't found out what yet.

"I also found out that Dumbledore has been filling out my release forms for Hogwarts. He can do that since he is my wizard guardian. I read that a few days after Sirius was sent to Azkaban, Dumbledore had the guardianship changed to him and the document sealed.

“Apparently it pays to be the Supreme Mugwump, Chief Warlock, and other such things. He got that file sealed so no one would find out without actually nicking the document itself. I also read the transcript of the trial. Dumbledore didn’t do much to help Sirius. He basically let him be sentenced without trying very hard to find out the truth. Granted, Sirius didn’t say much in his own defense, but still Dumbledore should have wanted to know what really happened.

“I know that it was Dumbledore, himself, who had that magic sensor thing set to watch this neighborhood. Fudge only trained it on me once I started mucking up his life. That old man had Mrs. Figg put here to watch me. I don’t know what she told him, but he didn’t do much watching or listening did he?”

“When I told him about your uncle attacking you,” Tonks said hesitantly afraid the truth might do more damage than good, but she knew Harry’s opinion on that subject. “He asked if you were unhurt. He didn’t seem to care about what that fight would do to you. I nearly got into it with him when he wanted things left as is. He told me not to tell the Order about it.”

“That sounds just like him from what I have learned. He has mucked about my life since everyone died. I should have been given to Remus to have been taken care of. He was the next one, after all, on the list my parents created when they went into hiding. Dumbledore wasn’t even on the list, yet here he is pulling the strings. Remus didn’t even know about their choice. Dumbledore prevented the notification from being sent out that night. Here is the real kicker. The list my parents created expressly says that I should never be given to Petunia for care. Never be given to her. My mum forbade it and what does Dumbledore do? He gives me to her against my mum’s wishes.

“I should have lived in my family’s home, Potter Estate, not in this hellhole. We have house elves there, or at least we did before we went into hiding. The Ministry files mention the house’s existence, but they don’t know where it is.

“My life has been fucked with ever since I was one year-old and Dumbledore is a big part of that. What gives him the right? Because he is the all-powerful Albus Dumbledore? Fuck him! How dare he do

the things he has done. I could have grown up in a normal home away from these people. Yeah, there would have been a werewolf and house elves, but it would have been better than this God forsaken place. A normal childhood is all I wanted. That is all I ever wanted. I dreamed of someone taking me away from here every night for as long as I could remember.

“The night Hagrid showed up is one the happiest of my life. He took me away from here, from these people, and I owe him for that. But Dumbledore put me here. I owe him for that as well.” Harry started getting darker in his mood and the feeling in the air reflected that as well.

“Harry, please listen to what I have to say.” Harry looked at her. “The magic you have been learning is dangerous to practice and use. You have done a great job with it, but there is more than just using it. You have to know when to use it and when not to. Dark magic is insidious. It can change a person for the worst. I know you can handle it because I have watched you. You hate using the spells, but it gives you a sense of strength and power. You have never been in control of your life until now.

“Do not think the magic gives you that power. It is you, who have assumed control over your life. You are getting the power because you are not letting others take it from you. Do not think that magic can produce power. That is the wrong way to think. It is the wrong way to go.”

“I don’t think that, Tonks. I know what is going on.”

“I know you do, Harry. I only want you to watch out. I can see you fighting the urge to hurt something and if you did you would only feel worse. You are a good person who has been in a bad situation. You are strong enough to find a way out of this doing the right things. I am here to help if you need it. Horace should have had this discussion with you about the spells you have been using, but I think he has gotten carried away with how fast you pick things up.”

“Fast? Ha, he says I am too slow every time. I am never good enough.”

“And would you try as hard if he did? Would you try to prove yourself with such determination if he praised you? He knows how to motivate you, Harry. He has used that to get the most out of you. It took me a week to get those shields mastered when he taught me, and I have to use my wand to do them too. You get them all in a day and wandlessly. Don’t tell me you don’t know how good you are at this stuff.”

“I just do my best, Tonks. That is all I have ever done.”

“And your best is better than anyone else’s. It is that simple. You are amazing and I am so proud of you. Be proud to be yourself. Anyone else would. You are Harry Potter and you are strong enough to make good things happen in this world. If you have to sneak around the Ministry and borrow files or fool a group of old guys, you can still make things happen that are good. I do not want you to fall into what is easy like the Death Eaters.”

“I am not like them!”

“I know you aren’t, Harry. I just wanted to remind you that doing what we do, it is a constant struggle to stay good. We have connections and support from people who get us out of just about anything. Our job is riddled with temptation that lesser men would fall prey to. Do not become overwhelmed by the magic you control. You wield more than anyone I know so please be careful. Besides, you are too cute to go bad.” Tonks smiled and altered her ears to make them pointed again.

Harry’s mood subsided, but he could still feel his magic swirling. “I will not disappoint you, Nymph.”

“I never said you would, Harry. Now, I should take a shower considering what you did to me last night. We can practice your Occlumency when I get back. The last thing we need is Albus finding a secret in your head today. He would only start digging trying to figure out what it is.”

“You got that right,” Harry said very seriously. “I will keep reading until you get back.” Tonks grabbed some clothes and put on her cloak. Being found in her knickers by the Dursley’s would be an unpleasant

experience for everyone. Harry watched Tonks leave the room but she flashed a leg before closing the door after her.

'She is crazy, but she is fun, and my life hasn't had much fun in it. I intend to keep having fun and enjoying my life. To hell with the Dark Tosser and his morons. To hell with the Ministry and anyone else who gets in the way. I am going to live through this and I am going to enjoy doing it too. Now what else haven't I been told.'

Harry pulled the discarded folder into his lap and continued where he left off. Every page told him something new about his life and his family. Every new fact gave Harry something else to think about. Every untold story filled in more of his past.

Harry read his father's school records. The disciplinary folder alone gave Harry many things to laugh about and quite a few ideas for the twins. Harry started a list and added things that seemed viable considering their talents. His father definitely had a problem with Snape. Most of the times he got caught were when Snape was the victim. As Harry thought about it, he started wondering how many of those times Snape set his father up to be caught. Many of them seemed similar to how Draco had tried to get Harry caught during his first year.

His mother's school folder nearly brought as many laughs but not for the same reasons. Harry could only think that Hermione's would read the same except for all the times his name would be listed next to hers. The scores and efforts his mother put forth were sickening. *'How could Mum be this smart and still end up with Dad? Their records are polar opposites of each other.'*

His mother had one detention in all her years, but a note on the sheet said that Lily was covering for another student but wouldn't reveal who. The detention was during seventh year and served with James Potter with McGonagall as the monitor.

Harry compared his parents' records for their seventh year and found that after the detention his father spent with his mother, he had far less nights of punishment. He couldn't help but laugh at the situation. *'Could Mum have changed him in three hours?'*

It was a laughing Harry that Tonks found when she returned to his room. "What is so funny, Harry?"

He explained the correlation and started laughing again. "Women can change a man in far less time than three hours, Harry. You remember that and you will go far in life as long as you accept the fact that you are the one to do the changing." Tonks cracked a smile and watched Harry figure out what she had said. Her own laughs stopped when Harry wrestled her onto the bed and held her down.

"Getting aggressive, I see."

"You wanted me more playful so here you are, Nymphadora."

"Yes, quite nice, Harry, but we have other things to do besides trying to suffocate each other. Oh, and next time don't suck so hard for so long. It took me ten minutes to hide all of the hickeys on my body. The ones on my neck were particularly hard to conceal. The ones on my back I couldn't see so I did my best. You better hope I don't have to get naked today in front of someone or there will be difficult questions to answer, mister."

Harry hesitated before letting his 'evil' grin spread across his face. He heard Tonks sigh as he lowered himself to give her a kiss. "Like I said last night, it is my life and everyone who has a problem with that can fuck off."

"I know and I am with you on that, but I don't even want to think about how the questions would be asked. Oh, the shame." Tonks was teasing with her words as she used her leg to rub Harry's bum.

"Now you stop that you frisky minx. Weren't we going to do something now?"

"Oh yeah, I need to test your Occlumency skills. I am not expecting perfection here, just a passable defense against Albus. At the very least, you should know when he is trying to get into your head. If he does, get my attention and we can stop him."

"Us stop him? What did have in mind, Nymph?"

"I don't know. I could ask him a question or step between you two. There are easy ways to stop it from happening. I doubt he will outright attack you with it. We will be among others and he doesn't need a scene like that where others can watch. Think of the press. *"Albus Dumbledore attacks Harry Potter's mind."* That would go over as well as Fudge winning the Most Charming Smile Award this summer. In fact, you have won that one haven't you?"

"I don't think so, but I never paid much attention to it. Ask Hermione or Mrs. Weasley that question. One knows everything; the other reads up on that kind of stuff."

"You really rely on Hermione for things don't you?"

"Yep. Either you rely on her or she makes you rely on her. It is easier not to fight it. You don't know her very well do you?"

"Not really. I just know what I have heard and the few days I was at headquarters when she was there. Ginny and I meshed better. She is more fun than Hermione. Less books around too."

"Anyway, let's get this over with. As much fun as it is having someone roam around your head, I would rather not."

"Well, I like roaming around your head, Harry. There is a lot in there I find humorous and entertaining."

"Glad I could help, Nymph."

"Much thanks, Harry. Now, ready?"

Harry nodded and he felt a presence in his mind. Harry signaled he felt her presence so she started pushing into his mind. Images started appearing in his mind for no reason. Harry tried to confine the source of the disruption, but with every attempt the intruder moved somewhere else.

"Try to box me in, Harry. I am not going to make this easy for you, but I am not going to run pell-mell in there either. Trap me with your mind. Use some of your magic if you have to but don't fry me in the process. I am too cute to be killed by you."

“That you are, Nymphadora.” Harry tried to box Tonks in but every time he got close she would escape his efforts. As his frustration levels rose, Harry started using more of his magic to confine her. He had her cornered once, but she broke through the thin walls he had created in an amateur attempt to confine her.

Getting even more frustrated with himself, Harry forced more magic into his attempts and trapped her presence tightly in his own mind. He opened his eyes and saw Tonks lying on the bed fighting against an invisible enemy. Harry dropped all concentration and moved to hold Tonks. Once his mind changed its purpose, Tonks was released by the magic and freed. A few deep breaths were taken before Harry scooped her up into his arms and held her to him.

“I am alright, Harry. I kept getting away when you were playing nice. I deserved what I got. You can trap anyone in your mind by doing what you did. Remember that if you need it in the future. Also if you put that much effort into it, you could choke attacker easily enough. I, for one, prefer our other way of trying to suffocate each other.” Tonks smiled widely and licked her lips.

Harry lowered his body a little as he held Tonks in his arms. “You think I could hold off Dumbledore?”

“If you needed to, most definitely. I don’t know if you could prevent the initial attack or break into his mind, but you should be able to hold him in place for a long time. There is no way he would expect you to be this good at Occlumency after Snape’s pathetic efforts. Now, how about some metamorph training. I would like to know how much you can do.”

“Alright, what is first?”

“Start with what you know you can do, hair length.”

Tonks spent the remaining time watching Harry struggle to change his appearance. He could lengthen his hair at will after thirty minutes, but he couldn’t change the color one bit. His eyes proved even more difficult. Harry couldn’t change the shape or color at all. After Tonks

told a very frustrated Harry how to change the texture of his skin, Harry proved that he lacked that ability as well.

Tonks went through every area of the metamorphmagus' training regimen she had created through her own life. Harry could change the length of his hair anywhere on his body with some serious thought. He could alter his center of gravity a little bit which aided him in his Quidditch skills and made Tonks very jealous since she couldn't. His reflexes were heightened by what little metamorph gift he had. Harry could do something else, but he flatly refused to tell Tonks what it was. Harry would only tease her saying that she might find out later in the summer.

A huffing Tonks brought the session to a close. "Well, you may not be me, but at least you have a few things you can do. The more you use them; the easier it is to make it happen quickly. I had hoped you would be more advanced, but I was just looking for someone to discuss the gift with. Don't worry, Harry, I still like you even though you aren't very talented at this one area of obscure magic."

"Thanks, Nymph, I think."

"That is a compliment, Harry. Now, it is nearly nine fifteen so you should shower so we can eat something quick before we leave for Gringotts. Wear something new and sexy."

"Ah, could you just pick out what you want me to wear. I would have just worn jeans and a t-shirt again."

"Oh, that is no good. You have to look dapper today. You are going to get some money and meet a few people you would probably rather not meet. So, you have to make a good impression and appear formidable. Dumbledore may spring some new summer plan on you that neither of us knows about yet."

"If he does, it will not go down easily. I will resist any plans he has for me. Anyway, what am I wearing?"

Tonks opened his trunk and sorted through the new clothes. "Here, wear these," she said tossing clothes at him. I will hang up your other

clothes and put away the files while you are busy. Now get moving.” Tonks shooed him from the room and into the hallway.

Harry turned and headed to the bathroom only to find Dudley leaving his room and Petunia dusting the picture frames. Both stopped what they were doing and stared at Harry with their jaws hanging open.

“What now?” Harry asked clearly lacking patience.

“What have you done to yourself?” Petunia asked a little angry and puzzled at the same time.

“What are you on about?”

“You taking steroids or what, Potter?” Dudley chimed in.

“Steroids? What the bloody hell are you on about, Dud?”

“Look at you,” Dudley said waving a hand at Harry. “You aren’t all titchy anymore. It has only been a week. You have to be hitting them hard for this kind of change.” Jealousy and anger could be heard in Dudley’s voice.

Harry looked at himself and found that he was holding his clothes near his waist covering certain areas. He also noticed that his arms, legs, and pretty much his entire body wasn’t so scrawny anymore. Over the last few days he didn’t have the time to realize what had been happening to himself. A long forgotten conversation came to his mind. *‘The potion they gave me. Didn’t they say something about me not being so small after that?’*

“Oh, this,” Harry said moving his hand up and down in front of himself. “I was given a potion to help me fill out a bit. I guess it is working. I have been so busy lately that I never noticed. Well, if we are finished, I need to take a shower. Excuse me.” Harry pushed past Dudley and dismissed his aunt with a look. Once the door was closed, Harry turned the water on and pretended his ‘relatives’ didn’t exist.

When Harry finished, he put on the clothes Tonks had given him. The shirt seemed a little bit tight around the shoulders, but he wasn’t going to say anything about it. The pants fitted fine and he tried in

vain to comb his hair. *'I can change the length, but I can't make it lay down. What good am I?'*

Harry left the loo and returned to his room to find Tonks sitting on his bed waiting for him. He noticed his trunk had been cleared of all clothes and his cloak was hung over the back of his desk chair. On the desk was the bottle of wine from the night before.

"As sexy as it was yesterday, Harry. Very nice," Tonks commented as if she was waiting to give him a score at some pageant. "We can finish the wine tonight when we have dinner, but it is breakfast time and the muggles need to see that you are alive and well."

"No worries on that. I met two of them on my way to the loo."

"Really?" Tonks seemed thoughtful. "Did they say anything interesting?"

"Actually, they thought I had been taking drugs to make me bigger. What was in that potion they gave me on Wednesday?"

"It is a special mix of stuff. We use it to help ourselves become stronger. It is much faster and safer than the ways the muggles try. It should almost be done so you won't get much bigger. It won't make you huge like some professional body builder, but it gets you going in the right direction. I don't think your body could handle much more than you have right now. It only gives you a comfortable increase in your strength. Do you like it?"

"I never noticed it until Dudley made a comment. Do you like it?"

"Did he really? Makes you think, don't it?" Tonks faded off. "What? Oh yes, I love it, Harry. You look very hot in your new clothes and improved physique. A heart stopper if there ever was one." Tonks watched as Harry got embarrassed and looked at the floor. "Modest as ever, too. That is what I like about you, Harry. Ever the clueless hottie."

"Ha! Is that what my Goblin name would be? Harry Ever-The-Clueless-Hottie Potter."

"I like it so I don't care how insulting you get about it. It fits all the same. Now, grab your new sexy cloak, your keys, and anything else you think you will need. Be prepared in case something happens. You take care of yourself above all others, Harry. I can take care of myself so you worry about you. Understand?"

"Are you expecting there to be trouble, Nymph?"

"I am not sure, but think about who the Blacks are related to. There is a good chance a Malfoy will be there for the reading. I don't think they will get anything, but as a direct family member they can't be excluded from the reading. I am sure they will lodge a complaint if they get nothing. Narcissa would not stand for being completely left out of the will. She has always had entitlement issues thinking she should get everything.

"Be prepared, Harry, that is all I want. There will be people in the same room who are enemies. That makes for a bad situation altogether. Be ready, be prepared, and for Merlin's sake stay sexy."

"Tonks! Can't you stay serious for one minute?"

"I could but this is far more entertaining. Come on, let's get some food, scare some Dursleys, and frustrate my aunt a whole bunch."

"I am glad you are looking at the bright side of this trip, Nymph. I know I won't be."

Tonks stood in front of Harry and gave him a passionate kiss while holding her soft body against his. Harry could feel her ample chest moving against his. Her silky top hid little and allowed her body heat to meld with Harry's. She broke the kiss only after running her hand down his chest and stopping right above his waist line. "Stay positive and I might be able to make it worth your effort, Harry." Tonks grabbed her cloak from the bed and moved to the doorway.

Harry grabbed his cloak and followed Tonks down the stairs and into the kitchen. As he walked trailing behind Tonks, he watched her bum and used that as motivation to ignore the Dursleys. Tonks seemed to be swishing her rear a little more than necessary as she walked and Harry could only figure that was on purpose.

The chatter from the kitchen ceased the moment the door opened, and Tonks entered the room without hesitation. She walked over to the cooker and found it clear of any food. "Ruddy muggles can't even leave a bit of toast for us? Ah, Harry, do you know how to cook? It is best if I remain a good distance from all kitchen ware and appliances."

"Yes, Tonks, I can cook. What do you want?"

"They don't count, Harry. Who are they going to tell anyway? Bacon sounds good and maybe some eggs while you're at it."

"Would you like some kippers as well?" Harry asked offhandedly.

"Yes, please."

"Too bad I haven't got any. You will just have to do without, Nymph." Harry smiled at Tonks.

"Rotten luck anyhow."

The Dursleys watched the by-play and were silent as Harry and Tonks bantered back and forth. Dudley slowly pushed his plate away and he hadn't even finished his food.

"What is wrong, Dud? Not hungry for once?" Harry asked.

"You two are making me sick," Dudley replied. "As if before wasn't bad enough."

"What before?" Vernon asked barely holding his anger in check.

Dudley looked at Tonks and then at Harry. He saw Harry tensing and flexing his wand hand. "No...nothing, Dad. Nothing, never mind."

"Dudley, don't you worry about them. They wouldn't dare do anything to you. Would you, Boy?" Vernon cast a scornful look at Harry.

"I would and you have nothing to say about it to begin with, Vernon. I haven't even been here a week and you are starting to return to your normal self. Do not forget what happened last time, Uncle. I am more

willing to stop you now than I was then. Do not test me.” Harry stared Vernon down and waited for the large man to relent.

Harry decided he should test out his Legilimency abilities while he had a ‘volunteer’ willing to participate. Harry made eye contact and tried to open Vernon’s mind a little bit just to listen. What Harry heard was very garbled and unintelligible. After a few minutes, Harry managed to figure out a little bit of what Vernon was thinking. Mostly, Vernon was trying to decide if Harry was bluffing or if he was serious. Harry chose to give Vernon proof.

Harry slowly drew his wand and held it at his side. Then he willed an Imprimis Shield into existence and waited for Vernon to react. His uncle jumped back from the table sending his chair flying across the kitchen. Harry watched Vernon back away as he sputtered incoherently.

“I am serious and I will not allow you to bully me, Vernon. Try it and I will fight back and I assure you that I will fight to win.”

“So, you are threatening me, Boy? Maybe I should call the police and let them remove you from my home.”

“You could do that, Dursley,” Tonks said drawing her wand with purpose. “Only once the police left I would come back and destroy this house. The thing is that is nothing compared to what the Death Eaters and Vol...You-Know-Who would do to you.”

“You almost said it, Nymph. Keep trying, you will get there.”

“Thanks, Harry. You see, Harry is the only person keeping you lot alive. If he leaves this dreadful place too soon, the protections on this house will fall and the Death Eaters will kill you. It is what they do and they would love to get a hold of anyone who has sheltered Harry.”

Tonks saw the gleam in Vernon’s eyes. “And before you get any ideas, Tubby, they won’t listen to you. You are a muggle and that makes you worse than a muggle-born wizard. You are as low on their list as you can get. Besides, Harry can protect himself if you didn’t know. Now, Harry, make with the food. Chop chop.”

"Thanks, Nymph, I think." Harry opened the fridge and started up the cooker. He kept one eye on Tonks and his relatives and the other on the food. He made up a decent sized breakfast and they ate while the Dursleys watched. Vernon never opened his mouth but the vein in his head was throbbing. Petunia looked down on every action, but her heart didn't seem to be in it. Dudley made a big production of looking away, but his eyes kept swinging back to watch Harry and Tonks.

When the eggs, bacon, and toast had been eaten, Tonks stood up and waved her wand cleaning the dishes. Every Dursley jumped and two squeaks and a grunt sounded in the kitchen.

"Well, that puts us near our time, Harry. We had best get going so we can arrive a little early. I will let you do the honours of creating the portkey. You had better make it near the apparition point and a return trip one just in case things get unpleasant."

"Alright, I can do that." Harry pulled out the metal ring and started concentrating. Vernon paled even more when he saw Harry tap the ring and it glowed blue.

"You keep getting faster at that, Harry. Do we have everything?"

"I think so. Let's get this over with." Harry sighed deeply and stepped towards Tonks. She put an arm around Harry's waist and held him tightly.

Tonks used her other hand to tilt his head to look at her so she could kiss him. When their lips broke, Harry held up the ring and Tonks grabbed it. A tap of Harry's wand triggered the portkey and they disappeared from the sterile kitchen reappearing in a very non-sterile Diagon Alley.

The bright sun did little to raise Harry's mood. He was sad and angry at the situation he found himself in. Thoughts kept swirling in his mind as Tonks pulled him along the alley towards their destination.

'I am always the one to survive. Why am I always left in the end? Why do others die when it should be me? Will Hermione be next?'

The Weasleys? Nymphadora? No, I can control who gets into that much danger. I can keep them away or in safer places. I can watch out for them. I can't lose anyone else. I couldn't live through that or at least I wouldn't want to.'

"Knut for your thoughts, Harry?"

"Just wallowing, Nymph. Don't mind me."

"Ha, like I will leave it at that. You get more cheerful or you will hear about it from me, mister," Tonks scolded.

"Yes, Nymph," Harry said in a resigned way.

"He would want you to be happy right now. Think about last night or all the trouble you are going to cause with his money. At the very least, remember Vernon's face when you threw up that shield." Tonks smiled widely and laughed.

"I will try. I hope things go well today, but knowing my luck they will fall apart within an hour." They walked up the steps to the bank and entered the lobby area. Harry saw a group of people standing near the gilded doors at the back of the bank. "Better make that five minutes, Nymph."

Tonks looked at the group and saw Dumbledore, Remus, Arthur and Molly Weasley, Narcissa Malfoy, and Cornelius Fudge. An array of aurors were scattered about the lobby taking up much of the open area. Harry turned to Tonks and gave her a wounded look.

"You are in charge, Harry. You are the primary beneficiary so you control the reading. Unless they are expressly mentioned in the will, you can object to their presence."

"Good, I plan to then." Harry squared his shoulders and strode towards the group. The new cloak Tonks had him buy was flapping behind him as he walked. The elegant material shimmered in the dim light of the bank; his body and his stride gave him a very imposing look. He focused on Remus and the Weasleys ignoring the others.

A few people in the lobby turned and followed Harry's movement with their eyes causing others to take notice. After a few seconds, most of the bank's patrons couldn't help but watch the young man advance on the idle group. The aurors watched Harry approach but many seemed to move back as Harry passed them.

"Remus, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley," Harry said as he neared the group causing them to turn around quickly.

"Harry, dear!" Molly exclaimed and rushed to sweep Harry into a vigorous hug. "I have been so worried about you, dear. Oh, how are you doing? The muggles treating you better?" Molly held him tightly before stepping back and holding him at arms length. "Harry, you have changed. Have you grown?"

"Molly, let Harry be. He just got here and this can't be easy on him," Arthur interjected preventing a larger scene from being made. "Having a good summer, Harry?"

"Better than any of the others all things considered," Harry answered.

"We need to discuss a few things when you have time, Harry," Remus said.

"Yes, well, we can arrange a time after all of this, Remus." Harry wasn't going to be weak in front of anyone. He had to put the strongest face forward and prove his resolve.

"Hello, Harry." Albus stepped forward and extended his hand in a gracious manner wearing a slight smile.

Harry looked at his hand and then up into the old man's face. Harry could tell Albus was trying to make amends but considering what he had learned earlier in the morning, Harry wasn't interested. He ignored the greeting, much to the surprise of everyone present, and looked to the Minister.

"Why are you here, Fudge?" Harry asked bluntly. One of Fudge's assistants nearly lost his head from shock at the way Harry addressed the sitting Minister, but many of the aurors had to work hard at hiding their mirth.

“Harry, my boy,” Fudge began in a very friendly way. He stepped forward extending his hand and placing his other hand on Harry’s shoulder. “How wonderful to see you again. Perhaps we could lunch together and speak of important matters. You could be of great assistance to the Ministry and the Wizarding world by helping me out with a few things.”

Harry smirked as his mood darkened. Everyone but Fudge noticed the mood shift. “If I get to be the one to throw you out of the Ministry, I am all for it. Otherwise, sod off you incompetent git.” Harry turned away from Fudge, brushed his hand off his shoulder, and ignored the shocked look on the Minister’s face. Albus watched the exchange and dropped his shoulders in disappointment.

The aurors couldn’t help but laugh at this point. Many had to turn around to hide their insubordination. Molly wore a dismayed look while Arthur chuckled with Remus. The only one who didn’t react was Mrs. Malfoy. All further discourse was interrupted by the doors opening and Griphook exiting through them.

“Mr. Potter and a guest may proceed to the hearing room in advance of the others to settle previous business,” said the goblin.

Albus stepped forward as did Remus. “Tonks let’s go,” Harry said as he moved toward the door with Tonks following him closely.

“Harry, maybe I should accompany you...” Albus stopped speaking when Harry and Tonks kept walking away without slowing. Once the doors closed, Molly stepped forward wearing a confused look.

“Albus, what did you do to the poor boy?” Molly questioned in her normal domineering motherly-tone. “He has always been so respectful.”

“I made a mistake and it appears that Harry hasn’t forgiven me for it.” Albus sighed and adjusted his eyeglasses. “Well, it appears we wait to be summoned.”

Harry and Tonks walked down the twisting hallways before being showed into a large room with an ornate table and numerous old chairs. Everything looked stately and formal in the light of the candle

chandelier hanging above the table. Harry and Tonks took seats next to each other facing the doorway.

Griphook accompanied another Goblin into the room. The goblin looked as old as Dumbledore, but he had no beard and no hair on his head. The goblin had numerous wrinkles and he walked with a gnarled, wooden staff with gold accents. The goblin slowly made his way to the high backed chair at the head of the table. Harry and Tonks looked at him and waited for him to do or say something.

The seconds ticked by as Griphook took up a position behind the elder goblin. The goblin sorted through a pile of papers slowly arranging them into smaller piles. Harry decided to prep his mind for the inevitable intrusion from Albus. Tonks was getting impatient and figured on having a little bit of fun while she could. She placed her hand on Harry's lap and started moving it up his leg.

A clearing of a throat stopped all activity in the room. "Mr. Harry Potter," the elder goblin prefaced. "I am Ragnok, director of Gringotts. I will be handling this hearing personally due to the implications presented by such a family merger."

"Family merger, sir?" Harry asked puzzled.

"Yes, Mr. Potter, the Black estate will mostly be rolled into the Potter estate. This is a serious matter that has every board member's attention. I am here to protect the interests of the deceased, the heirs, and the bank of course. If you have any questions now, during, or after the reading you are free to ask them. Moving forward, I will be available to you when needed, Mr. Potter."

Tonks' jaw dropped at the announcement and she looked at Harry finding a confused look. She nudged Harry earning a reaction from him. "Thank you, sir. I don't know much about all of this. I only recently learned a little about my family's financial position."

"Really?" Ragnok seemed honestly surprised. "Have you never received your statements? We send them out every month for account holders of your status."

"Is that so," Harry asked. "Does Albus Dumbledore know about the statements and their schedule?"

"Why, yes, he does. He is your guardian after all."

"I learned about that recently, too." Harry felt his anger increasing. "Is there something I can do about that? Some way I can change that or remove it altogether?"

"There are some things we can do but only if the position was abused by the guardian. Has Albus ever injured you?"

"No, not directly."

"Has he ever withdrawn money from your account without your knowledge?" Ragnok was getting more animated as time went on.

"I only found out about my vault when I turned eleven. So, anything before that would have been without my knowledge."

"If you are referring to your trust vault, then there is no recorded activity prior to your eleventh birthday's withdrawal. Now, your family account has had minor activity, but most of that is only prearranged maintenance activity. Some of your family investments have yearly obligations to meet and your father setup arrangements to comply with them. There have been no other improper deductions or activity."

"Are there any other ways?" Harry wanted to know the answer to this since he should be able to handle at least some of his family's business on his own.

"You have never received your monthly statements so that is a small breach of the guardianship agreement with Gringotts. Has the person in question ever broken a written contract in his dealings with you?"

"Yes, he has," Harry saw his only opportunity. "Before my parents were killed, they stated that I was never to be given to my aunt for care. I was supposed to go to Remus should Sirius not be available. Albus prevented that from happening. He sent me to live with my aunt."

"If you have a copy of that contract so I can verify the breach, it would be a direct violation in opposition with the documented wishes of his charge's parents. Essentially, the guardian would have usurped the orders of the parents and that is never permitted. The parents are the supreme authority in family matters concerning their own children even in death. Do you have the contract with you?"

"I have a copy from the Ministry," Harry pulled out his trunk and enlarged it. He sifted through the files until he found the right one containing the document his parents had drawn up. "Here, this is the list they created."

Ragnok looked it over and made a few murmurs. "This was witnessed by my predecessor and drawn up by one of our legal team members. I see the provision excluding your aunt from any kind of care and Remus Lupin being the preferred guardian. I know that Albus has been acting in that position for many years now. This is most interesting."

"I wish to be free from Dumbledore's manipulations," Harry said. "Today, if possible, before the reading."

"Griphook, please bring me the appropriate forms to carry out Mr. Potter's wishes. I am satisfied that Albus has overstepped his purview as guardian. We will file the paperwork to remove Albus as your guardian. This will be effective immediately in reference to Gringotts business, but the Ministry may take a few days to process it. Do you have another in mind to assume his position?"

"Couldn't I just take care of myself from now on?" Harry questioned. "I have pretty much been on my own anyway so it isn't much of a change."

"You need to be sixteen to hold your own council in the Wizarding world. That is merely a few weeks away, correct?" Harry nodded. "Then, Mr. Potter, if I may suggest a temporary guardian who will allow you to handle your own decisions."

"I will do it if you want me to." Tonks managed to regain her composure from earlier.

"That is great, Tonks. Thank you," Harry said quickly. "Mr. Ragnok, are there any restrictions on the guardian's behavior?"

"I am not sure I understand your meaning, Mr. Potter."

Griphook looked at Harry giving him an odd look. Harry nodded and Griphook leaned forward and whispered to Ragnok.

"Ah, I see then. No, Mr. Potter, there are no provisions against that sort of behavior. You are free to continue your relationship without worry."

Harry lowered his head and blushed. Tonks smiled and elbowed him playfully. Griphook left the room quickly to gather the papers. Ragnok returned to browsing the other files he had on the table.

"Are you sure you want to do this, Tonks?"

"Yes, Harry, I am more than willing to be your guardian for the next few weeks. It will be fun. I will get to do what Sirius never had a chance to do, corrupt Harry Potter as his father and godfather should have. I have a mission to accomplish, dear sir."

"Great," Harry said hesitantly. "I am not sure if that is a good thing or not." The pair continued to banter back and forth in a friendly way until Griphook returned with some forms. Harry watched Ragnok take the forms and fill them out one by one. When he was finished he handed them to Griphook and the goblin presented them to Harry and Tonks.

"You will each need to sign the forms and provide a wand imprint," Ragnok said eying the forms carefully. "I need to watch you sign them so I can list myself as a witness. Please proceed at your leisure."

Harry read over the forms as did Tonks and they signed them one at a time in the appropriate places. Once that was done, Harry gathered them up and gave them back to Griphook.

"Excellent, Mr. Potter," Ragnok said. "Now, I will sign these and submit them to the proper department. I will keep them sealed as much as I can." The goblin signed the forms and handed them to

Griphook to hold on to. "Are there any other things you wish to handle prior to the reading?"

"Do you know where Potter Estate is?" Harry asked.

"No, Mr. Potter, I do not. The location of old Wizarding families' homes are usually kept secret using spells. Perhaps your family chamber has information regarding its location."

"Chamber?" Tonks said quietly. Harry had visions of a damp chamber with a dirty great snake living in it.

"Yes, Ms. Tonks, Mr. Potter's family has a chamber here. Many of the old families had chambers from when the bank was first opened. I believe the Potter Family Chamber is number 7. Griphook, could you confirm that vault number?"

"Yes, Director, I will do so immediately." Griphook left the room quickly.

"Harry, you have a chamber here?" Tonks asked.

"News to me, Nymph," Harry replied. "I have no idea what that means anyway so why don't you tell me."

"The family chambers are supposed to have the highest level of security the bank can offer," Tonks began. "Only the oldest families have them since they are supposed to be very limited in number. You need to maintain a certain level of money to even qualify for one, too. No wonder the director of the bank is willing to handle your account personally."

"Your guardian is quite well informed, Mr. Potter," Ragnok spoke up.

"Harry, please, Mr. Ragnok," Harry said evenly.

"I suggest the same to you, Harry." Ragnok smiled causing a small shiver to run down Tonks' arm. Harry gripped her hand tighter when he felt the movement.

"So, ah, how much money do I have, Ragnok?"

"I do not have a current balance at this time. The last known inventory was made when your father assumed control over the family chamber. I can give you the balance in your trust vault, but that amount is small compared to your real worth."

"Never mind then," Harry relented. "Needless to say I have a lot then?"

"Yes, Harry, you are well represented financially." Ragnok smiled again at his understatement.

Griphook returned with a slip of parchment in his hand. He handed it to Ragnok who read the note. With a nod from the elder goblin, Griphook returned to his position behind Ragnok.

"I have a list of your current vaults in this bank, Harry. Your family chamber is number 7. Your trust account is vault number 687. A new vault was opened for you by the Weasley business men, number 1969. You will most likely end up with additional vaults after the reading since there are two others listed in the will. I can have Griphook take you to your family chamber after the reading if you wish."

"I would like to see it, but I am not sure if today would be the best day for that. Anyway, I think I am ready to get this over with. May we begin, Ragnok?"

"Yes, Harry. Griphook please escort the others in for the reading."

Harry waited and calmed his mind as much as he could. He prepared for what was going to be a very unpleasant experience. The minutes ticked by before the door opened and voices could be heard coming from the hallway. After Griphook entered the room, Albus was next followed by the others Harry knew. He thought Narcissa was last until Fudge entered the room without his aids. Harry stood instantly and set his body.

"I object to Fudge being here for the reading." Harry noticed the others' surprised looks.

“Come now, boy,” Fudge attempted to sway the current mood more to his liking. “Surely you won’t refuse the Minister of Magic from listening to a monumental will reading. This is an important event in history.”

“I won’t have it. Ragnok, I formally challenge his presence here.”

Albus showed surprise when Harry addressed Ragnok by name, but not nearly as much as when Ragnok answered Harry in kind.

“Minister Fudge, Harry has challenged your presence and unless you have an unknown link to the Black family, you will have to leave the room until otherwise notified.”

“But, I am the Minister of Magic. You can’t exclude me?” Fudge continued to bluster about while many watched the spectacle.

“Out!” Harry snapped. “If you do not leave, I will use every last knut to see you removed from office by the end of the month. Get the fuck out!” Harry saw Molly and Albus flinch. Arthur covered his mouth with his hand, but the laughter was still evident. Remus chuckled but kept a careful eye on Harry. Tonks let her mirth show on her face as she gazed at Harry in all his glory cussing out the Minister of Magic in front of Albus Dumbledore.

“Listen here, Potter, I will not be talked to like that. Least of all by you.” Fudge was trying to bully Harry into letting him stay.

Harry stepped away from the table and strode around it to where Fudge was standing. His cloak billowed behind him giving Harry an aura of authority. He walked right up to Fudge and found he had to look down quite a bit to look him in the eyes.

“You will leave, arse, or I will remove you myself,” Harry forced a little magic into his words and waited for a reaction. What he saw gave him hope. Fudge took a step backwards and started fumbling with his green bowler hat. Harry waited for a verbal response, but didn’t get one.

Losing patience, Harry swatted the hat out of the Minister’s hands knocking it to the floor. Harry stepped forward planting his left foot in

the center of the hat crushing it. "I told you to leave, Fudge. I have stared down Voldemort, himself, more than once. If you think you can do better, go ahead and try." Harry ignored the wave of shudders and stifled voices.

"You have made a big mistake, Potter!" Fudge exclaimed.

"You may be right about that, Fudge. I probably should have cursed you instead of talking to you. I will remember that for next time though. I rarely make the same mistake more than once. Now, leave while you still can." Harry towered over the pathetic man.

"Ragnok, surely you can allow me to stay," Fudge tried.

"Even if I could, which I can not, I wouldn't dare try, Minister." Ragnok looked at Harry and smiled. "I think I see the future of the Wizarding world and I am not about to side against him. I bid you good day, Minister." Ragnok waved a hand at Griphook and he advanced toward Harry and the Minister.

"Sir, you are to leave this room immediately," Griphook stated plainly. "If you refuse, you will be removed by security." The goblin waited for compliance.

The Minister attempted to intimidate Harry once more, but he stopped when he saw what looked like flames in the bright green eyes which were boring holes straight through his head. "This, is not, the end, of this, Potter," stuttered the defeated man.

"You know where I live, Fudge," Harry said. "Since your own people sent two Dementors to kill me last summer. This may not be the end, but I would watch yourself if you intend to continue your efforts from last year. I hear you are just barely holding on to your job. I wonder what would happen if I went to the Prophet today and demanded your resignation? I understand people like me again so I am not sure who would win that fight. You or me?" Harry stared at Fudge and waited for him to leave.

Albus spoke up. "Minister, I will see what I can do to resolve this issue, but I think it is best for you to leave right now."

Harry knew Albus would try to play both sides. He knew the old man saw the opportunity to gain additional leverage on the Minister. Harry watched Fudge nod to Albus and retreat from the room quickly. Only after the doors were closed by Griphook did Harry step back and bend over to pick up the flattened hat. He started back to his seat hat in hand until he passed the fireplace. With a flick of his hand, Harry tossed it into the fire and continued to his seat next to Tonks.

The flames consumed the green material in the minutes everyone was silently watching Harry. He looked to Tonks who smiled widely.

"Do not encourage him, Tonks," Molly said tartly. "Harry, you could be in serious trouble for doing that. I know he isn't much of a leader, but he is who we have."

"If he tries anything, Mrs. Weasley, he will find himself on the street. I promise you that." Harry folded his hands in his lap and looked at everyone who was seated around the beautiful table.

"Do you have any more objections, Harry?" Ragnok asked.

"One, but I understand that family has a right to be here." Harry accented his point by looking right at Narcissa.

"You are correct, Harry, family have a right to be here," Ragnok said for the benefit of the room. "Now we will begin if there are no more objections." The room was silent except for the small parts of hat that were being devoured by the flames.

Ragnok pulled an envelope from the pile of papers, broke the was seal, and opened it. He unfolded the document and Harry could see familiar script written on the page. It was the same writing as the notes he got from Sirius over the few short years he had been free. Harry willed himself not to break down at the thought of it.

Tonks watched Harry fight against the emotions. She knew when he gained control, because his face quickly became impassive and blank. A sad thought clouded her mind as she saw Harry shut down.

"I, Sirius Black," Ragnok began reading the will. "Do hereby declare this as my last will and testament. For my dear cousins Narcissa and

Bellatrix, I leave you shite. You deserve nothing and that is what you receive, nothing. Get out now, both of you!"

Harry broke into laughs as he processed what Sirius had done. "I object to receiving nothing, Ragnok," Narcissa said.

"I did not know we were on a first name basis, Mrs. Malfoy," Ragnok replied. "Your objection is noted and can be addressed at the end. I will continue with the reading."

"Now that is taken care of, I can get to the good stuff. I get to give away everything I own and more importantly, the stuff my family owned. Ha, I can see my mother rolling over in her grave right now. At least I hope I can. To Remus, my dear friend, I leave you a bunch of money and all of my clothes. You need them so take them. To Albus, I leave you the family library. I know I never used it and many of those books shouldn't be in the hands of others.

"To the Weasleys I leave money. You earned it by taking care of Harry when I couldn't. Besides, any stuff I give you would taint the home Harry loves most. I also give Molly my apologies for all the arguments. I know you were just trying to do what was best for him, but I wanted him to enjoy his life. I have been there so I know what it is like. To my little Nymphie, ha, can't hit me this time, I leave you my notebook of wrong-doings. Be sure Albus never reads it and Harry does. One should be left to wonder and the other should be left to laugh at what his father and I got into.

"Lastly, to Harry I leave everything else. All the money, houses, and other such crap. But most importantly, I leave you my motorbike and the hope that you will prove me right. I told Lily, on your very first night home, that you would set the world on its ear and outdo me and your father combined. You are on the right track, Harry, keep it up and do not mourn this old dog. I love you, son."

Harry couldn't stop the tears from falling. He didn't care that he was crying in front of so many people. He had heard the words he had wanted to hear for his entire life. He was loved and he knew it. He felt the warm sensation wash over him as those words were read aloud. He looked at Molly and found her crying as well. She was gazing at

him in a motherly-way. He figured she was trying to stop herself from running around the table to hug him.

Remus had a sad smile on his face and he kept his eyes glued to the table top in front of him. Albus hid his emotions well, but he too seemed sadden by the flippant way Sirius had written his will. Harry looked to his side and saw Tonks crying too. She looked at Harry and started rubbing his arm in a consoling way.

"That ends the reading," Ragnok announced. "Now, I will address your complaint, Mrs. Malfoy."

"I am the nearest blood-related family member," she began heatedly. "I can not be excluded from the disposition of monies. Potter can not be given everything. I speak for myself and my sister who I know would not stand for this either."

"It is too bad she couldn't attend, Narcissa," Harry said coolly. "It would have been so nice to see her again. At least that way I wouldn't have to go looking for her. She did kill Sirius so I have a debt to repay."

As Harry spoke, the room grew cooler. Albus watched his favorite student become more frightening than any other student he had seen aside from Tom Riddle himself. Albus waited to see what would happen next.

"I am sure my sister would love to see you again, Harry," Narcissa replied. "She said you two were interrupted last time."

"Oh, yes, we were," Harry said letting a little bloodlust into his words. "Tell her next time we can finish our lesson properly. I hope to see her soon. Something like this really can't wait very long. If she has a time and place in mind, by all means let me know." Harry sat back in his chair and watched how his words were received.

Remus looked ready to kill as much as Harry felt ready. Albus appeared to be in thinking mode. The Weasleys seemed to want out of the room as fast as possible before the spells started flying.

"I will tell her, Potter, don't you worry about that. You might want to write your own will while you are here though. These are dangerous times in case you haven't read the paper lately." Narcissa seemed to enjoy her current position on the opposite side of the table from Harry. Harry merely inclined his head to the hateful Black family member.

"In reference to your complaint, Mrs. Malfoy," Ragnok returned to the business at hand. "Mr. Black has every right to divide the family estate as he saw fit. He very clearly chose to leave you nothing. The only way you could be gifted anything from the estate is through the charity of Harry Potter since he is the primary beneficiary. Harry, do you wish to gift anything to Mrs. Malfoy?"

"Not at this time, Ragnok, no." Harry looked at Narcissa. "If you could arrange a meeting with your dear sister, I might be able to see fit to give you some furniture or other family heirlooms. If you are interested, let me know."

"I am not a charity case, Potter."

"On the contrary, I think you are, but that is neither here nor there. No meeting, no family crap. Now, since the reading is over, I would like you to leave, Mrs. Malfoy. Be sure to tell Draco hello for me. This next year won't be like the last ones. And if you get to see the Death Eater you call a husband, wish him my best." Harry smiled evilly and waited for the prim and proper woman to leave the room.

She looked to Ragnok for further assistance or support but found none. She stood up with as much poise as she could having been slighted so thoroughly and headed for the exit. As she opened the door, she turned and spoke. "Be careful what you wish for, boy. You might just get it."

"I could only hope for such a wonderful opportunity, Narcissa." Harry kept his eyes directed at her until the door closed. "Thank Merlin that is over with. I thought she would never leave."

"Harry, it is not wise to antagonize one's enemy," Albus spoke airily.

"Stuff it old man," Harry retorted. "I got a better one for you. It is not wise to lie to someone who you need in the end." The room had gone

silent with Harry's response to Albus. He had insulted the most powerful wizard in the world and he didn't seem to care.

"I apologize for my errors in judgment, Harry. I am still human." Albus waited for the old Harry to give in. It didn't happen.

"When you are ready to confess all of your lies, I will be waiting. Until then, please leave the room. You got the books so go get them out of that damn house before I burn it down. The rest of you should stay since I like all of you." Harry felt Albus probe his mind lightly looking for an opening. "I would stop that, Professor, or I will be forced to defend myself. One's mind should be private from others. Don't you agree?"

"I am not sure what lies you speak of, but I need to remain for specific reasons, Harry," Albus adjusted his cloak trying to cover the fact that he got caught trying to probe Harry's mind.

"If you mean the guardianship you had so carefully hidden from the world and me, you are wrong. I had that changed earlier. One more lie you were caught in. Would you like to tell me more before I find them out? It would be a step in the right direction."

"Ragnok, what is the status of my guardianship over Harry?" Albus asked promptly.

"Dissolved, Albus, due to a breach of contract on your part," the goblin answered. "You knew the limits and you overstepped. Harry presented his case and I found merit in it. If you wish to challenge my ruling, you may, but I think it would end up worse than the other two challenges did today. It would be a very public hearing considering those involved and you would not look very altruistic to the general populous."

"What did I do, Harry?" Albus asked.

"Petunia was enough in my book," Harry responded. "You violated my parents' wishes more than once to get control of me. I am not sure you can ever recover from that one. Ten years of hell add up to a lot, Albus. I will not forget that. If you want, I can go on. I have more you know. I haven't been sitting on my arse for the last week."

"That much is obvious, Harry," Albus said resigned to the fact that he had lost most of Harry's trust. "If there is a way for me to repair our relationship, please tell me. As you asked, I will leave you to the finer points. Good day, Harry. Ragnok, thank you. Everyone, Sunday then." Albus stood and left the room.

"Harry, how could you talk to Albus like that," Molly scolded him. "He is still Albus Dumbledore and your headmaster."

"He is a manipulative old man that got caught messing about with my life," Harry said forcefully. "I will not allow him to continue doing so. If I have to bring it up in front of others to stop him, then so be it. Now, Ragnok, what do we have left to discuss?"

"We must settle the specifics of the disbursement. The deceased left percentages for the money. The Weasleys receive a sum of forty thousand galleons. Remus Lupin receives a sum of three hundred thousand galleons. Harry you receive the remainder of the Black estate. I can tell you the amount if you would like."

"No thank you, Ragnok," a depressed Harry slouched even further in his chair. "I guess it is more than the other two so it is a lot. Just put it in my family vault."

Ragnok seemed to understand Harry's position. "Ah, yes, you also receive the Black family vault, number 183, and Mr. Black's personal vault, number 711. Here are the keys to the vaults. The aforementioned motorbike is in number 711 in case you wanted to take it with you today."

"Harry," Mrs. Weasley spoke up. "Motorbikes are dangerous. You should sell it and stick with wizard transportation."

"And having Voldemort after you isn't dangerous?" Harry asked evenly. Molly shuddered at the name. "It is just a made up name for a psychopath by the same psychopath. There is no reason to fear the name, Mrs. Weasley. Besides, I would rather die on the motorbike than at the point of that wand any day. At least he wouldn't have the satisfaction of killing me. That would really piss him off."

Molly was the picture-perfect-image of horror. Her mouth moved but no words came from it. It continued for a few seconds while Harry waited to be yelled at. "How can you be so, so, so like the twins about this? This is your life you are joking about."

"If I don't joke, what have I got left?" Harry asked. "It is either joke or run and hide. I am done hiding from him. I am done being stuck away until the next school year. I am going to live my life and if the Dark Tosser shows up then I will fight him. It is either living my life or waiting to die. It is an easy choice to make in my opinion."

"Oh, Harry, I can't bare to watch you put yourself in danger like that." Molly wrung her hands together. "You are as much a son to me as any of the others. Why must you make me worry so?"

Harry laughed. "You can always step back and forget you ever knew me."

"Not a chance, young man."

"Well, then I guess you are stuck worrying about me. I am not going to back down." Harry looked at the faces staring at him. "Ragnok, let's go find that bike. I think I need to learn how to ride. Tonks are you coming?"

Tonks looked to Molly and saw the unspoken order to remain for a few minutes. "I will catch up, Harry. I think someone needs to yell at me."

Harry saw the situation and nodded. "You have fun with that, Tonks. You know where to find me." Harry stood and helped Ragnok to the door. The two struck up a conversation as they slowly made their way out of the room.

"He has no clue who Ragnok is, does he?" Remus asked of Tonks.

"Nope," Tonks answered. "He just knows he is an old goblin and the director of Gringotts. When they started using first names, I didn't know what to do but Harry just kept on going. Our little Harry is on a first name basis with the leader of the goblins. Oh, he is all grown up."

Tonks tried to keep it light by joking and everyone but Molly seemed willing to play along.

“Tonks!” Molly started in. “How could you let Harry go get that bike. He could get hurt. He could die on it. You are supposed to be helping him get over Sirius and learning to work with us. It is for his own good.”

“Harry can do what he wants to do, Molly,” Tonks said firmly. “You people decided I would do all those things, not me. Harry runs his own life and I like it that way. If he wants to race around on that bike, then I am all for it. This is the first time in his life he has a say in what happens to him. If you want to try and stop him, be my guest. I, on the other hand, plan to teach him how to ride that motorbike. It should be fun. Think of all the muggles he will annoy while riding it around their quiet neighborhoods. Oh this is going to be a fun week for the Dursleys.”

“You are as bad as Sirius, you know that?” Molly commented. “No regard for the safety of others. Do you not care about Harry’s life?”

“More than you can know, Molly,” Tonks said forcefully. “I want his life to be worth living. Thus far, it hasn’t. Ask him yourself if you disagree.”

“Tonks, I only want what is best for him,” Molly deflated and began wringing her hands again. “He is like a son to me.”

“Then be happy for him,” Tonks said. “Harry only wants to have a little fun. His life has had very little of it so far. Now, I think I should catch up with him. No telling what he could get himself into with Ragnok. They might try to overthrow the Ministry if we leave them alone too long.” Tonks smiled widely and walked over to Griphook.

Remus watched the auror and the goblin leave the room. Tonks seemed happier then the last time he saw her. “She seems buoyant today.”

“I think she has a new man in her life,” Molly said offhandedly. “She was frustrated at the last Order meeting. Something about being

interrupted or something. I hope she is keeping her focus on Harry when she is protecting him. We know Dung isn't reliable."

"Molly," Arthur stated. "She may be young, but she knows what to do. Harry seemed better, mostly. At least he seemed friendly to me. I don't know what Albus did, but he had better fix it soon. Harry seemed pretty mad at him."

"I have never seen Harry like that before," Molly expressed her concern. "He is a good boy, but I got scared there for a bit. I think Sirius's death has changed him, poor dear."

"I think it has," Remus added. "I only hope it is a temporary change. Harry is in a position to carry out any of his intentions if he wants to. He insulted the Minister of Magic and I think we all know that Fudge can't do anything about it. Harry was right that he could have him removed. With Ragnok and the money he has, Harry really has no limits on what he could do."

"Harry will do what is right," Arthur said without hesitation. "He has always done what is right. You need not look any further than what he has done in school to know that much. Now, I think we should go see what forty thousand galleons looks like. Coming dear?"

"Oh my," Molly said putting her hand to her mouth. "That is right. Sirius left us something. What a sweet man?"

"Quite a change in your tune, Molly," Remus chided.

"It does not do well to speak ill of the dead, Remus." Molly grabbed her husband's hand and they led the way out of the room and into the hallway. Two goblins were waiting and one took the Weasleys to the cart room. "I guess I should go see what clothes that old dog left me." The goblin waved Remus down the hall and to the lobby. All the while, Remus kept thinking. *'You damn, fool. Why did you have to die on me too? Now, Peter is all that is left, and I will kill him if I get the chance. You foolish man, but I miss you all the same.'*

Harry kept up an idle conversation with Ragnok on the way to Sirius's vault. He was surprised by how much the elder goblin enjoyed the cart ride. They zoomed down the track and around a bend. The breakneck speeds reminded Harry of his broom and he longed to ride it again.

The cart came to a stop at vault number 711. Harry looked around and saw vault number 713. He remembered when Hagrid brought him down there to get the Philosophers' Stone. Harry looked up and down the walkway in front of the vaults. He saw a light flickering in the distance, but because of the darkness, he couldn't see who or what it was.

"Ragnok," Harry posed. "Are there other people down here? There is a light coming this way."

"I am not sure, Harry," Ragnok said calmly. "What do you think it is?"

"I don't know, but I am not taking any chances." Harry moved back behind a pillar and listened to the faint voices echoing off the walls of the corridor. Harry unconsciously used his left hand to move Ragnok behind him while drawing his wand with his right.

Harry got into a defensive position and waited as the people grew closer. He could make out a few words from their conversation. He heard 'ward' and 'security' but he also heard 'You-Know-Who'.

Once the people had reached vault number 709, Harry jumped out and leveled his wand at the taller of the men. A shocked face turned into a wary grin as he saw Harry.

"Harry, fancy meeting you here." Bill Weasley held his arms out to the sides to show he wasn't a threat. "Would you mind lowering your wand a bit? I kind of like my head where it is, thanks."

"Bill, what are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"I work here, but you knew that."

"Harry, you know this employee?" Ragnok had moved into the walkway.

“Director, sir,” Bill stated formally.

“Yeah, I know Bill, Ragnok,” Harry said casually putting his wand away. “He is the son of Molly and Arthur Weasley.”

“Ah, yes, from the reading,” Ragnok said. “Pleasant people your parents are, Bill. They are quite comfortable now, financially. So, how is the security check going, Brognot?”

A goblin moved from behind Bill and approached the Director. “Director, we have been evaluating the security in this wing and found it adequate, but not ideal. No vaults have been entered illegally.”

“You knew they were down here?” Harry asked the Director. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted to see how you would handle the situation, Harry,” Ragnok replied with a goblin smile. “I was pleased with what you did. Just to assure you, these security checks are preventive in nature. Gringotts prides itself on its security. We have only had one break-in in the last century that wasn’t stopped.”

“I know,” Harry said. “Professor Quirrell broke into 713 to steal the Philosophers’ Stone but Hagrid and I had removed it hours before.”

“Professor Quirrell was the culprit?” Ragnok spoke with an edge to his voice. “How long have you known this and who else knew?”

“I have known since the end of my first year at Hogwarts and I think Dumbledore knew as well. I wouldn’t worry about him trying it again since he is dead.”

“It is good news that he is dead, but its bad news that I wasn’t informed of the thief’s identity. Brognot, Weasley, please continue the security checks. I would like this wing better secured by weeks’ end.”

“Yes, sir,” both answered.

Bill eyed Harry as they started walking again. “I hope to see you soon, Harry. Mum has been trying to get you released from the muggles since day one. Take care, Harry.”

“Goodbye, Bill,” Harry said. “You do the same. Goodbye, Brognot.”

“Mr. Potter,” Brognot replied lowering his head respectfully.

“On to our previous business, Harry,” Ragnok said. “I will open the vault for you.” Ragnok did the same motions as Griphook did years earlier to the neighboring vault. He ran his finger down the front of the vault and Harry heard the locks clicking open. The door swung open and Harry peered inside.

He saw the vault had been cleared of money and only a few things remained. A sheet was covering a large object near the back of the vault and a shelf near the door held a journal of sorts. Harry picked up the journal and opened to the first page. It was titled, “A Marauder’s Tally” and it was signed by Sirius. Harry held the book tightly against his chest and wondered if his father had a journal of his marauding as well.

Harry slipped the book into his cloak so he could give it to Tonks when he saw her. He looked at the only thing left in the vault, the sheet covered object. Walking across the sizeable vault, Harry heard his footsteps echo softly. He figured his new trainers had a lot to do with his now soft steps.

He reached out and pulled on the sheet dropping it to the floor. Harry took a deep breath when he saw the chrome reflect the candle light. The motorbike was in perfect condition. Harry didn’t know what to say or do.

“It has a Restorative Charm on it,” Tonks said from the entryway. “Harry, may I have access to vault number 711?”

“Of course you can, Tonks, why do you need to ask?” Harry questioned.

“Because, I have to or the security wards will do nasty things to me.” Tonks stepped into the vault and walked over to Harry. She wrapped her arm around his waist and softly rested her head on his shoulder. “He cared about this bike so much. He has every charm imaginable on it. Restorative, a Sparkle Charm, the Flying Charm, the Self-

Righting Charm, and a few others I can't remember. This was his baby until you came along."

"I wish I knew all that." The depressed way Harry spoke made Tonks hug him tighter.

"You know now, Harry. I only knew him for a few years before he was sent to Azkaban. We reconnected last summer. He told me stories about you. I remember one where he waited until your mum left you in the back yard while she went to get something from the house. Sirius said he took that as a sign from Merlin himself to kidnap you for a few hours.

"He didn't give specifics, but he did say that your mum was none too happy to find the two of you flying around the countryside on this very bike. He knew he was relatively safe as long as he had you, because your mum would risk hurting you by shooting spells at him. He stalled until your dad got home from somewhere and tried to get him to help the foolish dog out of the hole he had dug himself into.

"From reading between the lines, I figured that Sirius was banned from the house for a week and he couldn't sit straight for three." Harry started laughing a sad laugh. "He told me it was worth every day though. He said you loved flying on this bike almost as much as you loved the trips on your father's racing broom when your mother was absent."

Tonks hugged Harry again and planted a light kiss on his cheek. "Go on, have a seat. It is yours, you know."

"I know, but it just doesn't seem right. It is his bike, not mine."

"It is yours now, Harry. That is how he wanted it. Don't refuse the one thing he really wanted you to have. This is what he wanted to give you when you turned seventeen. I think your mum refused to let it happen earlier."

Harry held Tonks tightly and sighed a few times. He thought about everything that happened that day and how sad everything seemed to end up. He wanted one good thing to come of the day. He pulled

out the journal and handed it to Tonks. "This is yours, Nymph. I only looked at the first page. Let me read it when you finish it."

"Thank you, Harry. What are you going to do now?"

Harry smiled lightly and smirked. "Sorry, mum, but Sirius wins this one." Harry reached out and grabbed a hold of the handle bars. He gripped them tightly and swung his leg over the bike and sat down. The bike sank a little but was perfectly quiet otherwise. Harry looked at Tonks and gave an embarrassed smile.

"Do you know how to work one of these things?" Harry asked bashfully.

"Yes, I do. I wanted to know how to use all muggle vehicles when I got out of Hogwarts. Now, first you have to put up the kick stand and then you..."

Over the course of the next few hours, Tonks instructed Harry on the finer points of motorbike operation and safety. Harry learned quickly but needed room to practice riding. Once the engine roared to life, Griphook entered the vault to see what was making all the noise. He offered Harry an unfinished corridor to practice in.

With the bike strapped down to a cart, Harry, Tonks, and Griphook said goodbye to Ragnok and delved deeper into the catacombs. When Griphook turned into a large, empty cavern, he stopped the cart. They unloaded the bike and Harry began his first riding lesson.

It was lucky for Harry that the Self-Righting Charm still functioned or he would have crashed a few times. Tonks was appalled to learn that Harry had never learned to ride a bike before but fortunately his Quidditch skills assisted with his balance. A few close calls later and Harry was riding around the room at a comfortable speed.

As his confidence grew, so did his daring. Harry learned to lean into the turns at higher speeds and the miracle of brakes. When he was thoroughly comfortable with his abilities, Tonks joined him in riding.

He found out that a second person changed the dynamics enough that you couldn't become complacent even for a second.

Once Tonks felt satisfied in Harry's skill, she pointed to a lever on the tank. Harry pulled the lever and he felt the bike shudder. Only when the front wheel started lifting off the ground did Harry figure out what the lever was used for. Harry made short work of figuring out how to control the bike in the air.

Harry learned that he could use a Silencing Charm on the exhaust to make the bike nearly whisper-quiet. Tonks dabbled with the Disillusionment Charm on the bike and found the proper place to tap to hide the whole machine. After some fancy flying and riding, Harry landed the bike and Tonks dismounted letting Harry continue his fun.

Harry's mood improved as he thought more about what Sirius would really have wanted him to do. *'Sirius would want me to ride this thing everywhere and cause trouble with it. How many people get to learn how to ride inside of Gringotts anyway? I will make you proud, Sirius. I promise.'*

Tonks checked her watch and waved Harry down. "It is getting late and we should be getting home. We need to eat and I owe you a little fun before the night is over."

"Okay, let's get this thing loaded onto a cart and go home."

They wheeled the bike over to the cart they had used to get where ever they were and strapped it down. Griphook, who had brought some paperwork to complete, checked everything before he set the cart into motion. They rocketed back to the surface twisting and turning with the track. Tonks settled into Harry's arms for the majority of the trip. She snuggled into him and relaxed taking in the scent of Harry and motorbike.

At the top, they unloaded the bike and wheeled it out the front door drawing quite a crowd of onlookers and curious people. Harry scanned the crowd once, and then continued to the Apparition point. Tonks followed keeping an eye on anyone who could pose a threat. Harry pulled out the ring and tapped it discretely with his wand altering its destination.

Harry held out the ring for Tonks to grab onto and he waited for the timer to go off. When the tugging stopped, Harry saw the desired alleyway off the quiet street a few blocks away from Privet Drive.

"This is for you, Sirius," Harry said aloud. He straddled the bike and started the engine. It roared to life and Harry revved it a few times. "Care to join me, Nymph?"

"It would be my pleasure, Harry."

Harry released the clutch and powered down the street. He made a few laps around the neighborhood getting the feel for the bike on the muggle roadways. After a half hour or so of Harry cruising around Little Whining, he came to a stop in front of the Italian restaurant they had eaten at before. Harry realized he was still wearing his new cloak so he removed it and put it in the saddle bag attached to the bike.

Tonks did the same and reached out a hand to pull Harry into the establishment. They were seated in the same booth they had last time and ordered the same meal. They ate quickly not bothering to speak much. When they were finished, Tonks paid the bill with the muggle money she had in her pocket. Harry made a mental note to change some of his galleons into pounds.

They left the restaurant and headed to Privet Drive. When they pulled into the driveway, Harry couldn't help but rev the engine one last time. He turned off the motor and escorted Tonks to the front door. She found the door locked, but a wand flick and a word fixed that instantly.

They entered the house and were met with a blustering Vernon standing in the hall. "Yes, Vernon, you wanted to say something?" Harry asked nicely.

"What in the devil was that noise?" Vernon boomed.

"That, oh, that is my motorbike. Be sure not to hit it tomorrow if you take the auto somewhere. I would be very angry if you damage it." Harry spoke evenly but made sure to get his point across.

"A motorbike?" Vernon yelled. "You can't drive a motorbike. You aren't old enough. And where did you get a motorbike? You have no money in the first place."

"My godfather left me the bike, and I can ride it when ever I like. I am a wizard so I do not need a license."

"Funny thing, when the police stop us they seem to forget what they were trying to do. Imagine that," Tonks chimed in.

"Yes, well, we have had a long day so if you will excuse us." Harry motioned Tonks up the stairs with his hand.

"You will keep that motorbike out of our driveway and away from the house," Vernon demanded. "I will not have the neighbors thinking we support that kind of behavior. A motorbike, honestly."

"I will park the bike where ever I wish to park it, Vernon," Harry told his uncle. "If you have a problem with that, then too bad. I really don't care what you want. Goodnight." Harry ascended the stairs right behind Tonks who was swaying her rear again.

When the door to the room was closed, Harry grabbed Tonks from behind earning him a squeal. "Why did you do that when we were walking up the stairs?"

Through her laughter and suggestive winks, Tonks replied, "Because it is fun and I wanted you a little worked up."

"I think you putting your hands a little low on the ride back managed to accomplish that much, Nymphadora."

"I did, huh? I never would have known." Tonks attempt at an innocent look failed when she grinned devilishly and pulled Harry on top of her and began to snog him to within an inch of his life.

The minutes rolled by before Harry could even think of something to say. "Tonks, what are we going to do tonight?"

"I was thinking of returning the favour from last night, Harry. You know those things can be annoying while they heal."

“Well, don’t you have some healing skills? You are a second level yellow, right?”

“Oh, I guess I am. I should have been able to heal those easily enough. I wonder why I didn’t do that.” Tonks smiled and forced Harry’s hands over her own head while she drove her mouth onto his. “Maybe I wanted you to sympathize with me. Or maybe I wanted to remember where your mouth had been.”

“You couldn’t remember without the marks?”

“I think you will have to remind me, Harry. Now get to it.”

Before Harry got too much into the fun, he put up a Silencing Charm on the room. Tonks pulled his attention back to her by pulling his lips to hers. Harry kept kissing her as he pulled her shirt free from her pants. He started moving the shirt up slowly with his left hand as he continued kissing her.

After a few minutes of that, Tonks pushed him off and pulled her shirt over her head in one swift motion. “Enough of that shirt for the evening.” She pulled him to her and started kissing him fiercely.

Harry let her tongue ravage his mouth and her hands remove his own shirt. He lowered his chest to hers and slowly began to move against her. He felt her lace bra rub against his skin with every movement. Her hands were in his hair and gripping his back. He wrapped his arms around her body and pulled her to him lifting her off the bed.

He held her in place while his fingers moved to the clasp on her bra. His nimble fingers worked away for a few minutes before he willed the frustrating hook to release. The bra released instantly and Harry slowly removed it from Tonks body freeing her breasts from their confinement.

She sighed deeply before her mouth latched onto his neck and began sucking as if she was desperately trying to draw blood. Harry moaned softly and maneuvered his mouth to return the favor. They proceeded to mark each other quite thoroughly before Harry broke free and started trailing kisses down her chest.

He went all the way from her neck to her lower abdomen before starting back up. He paused at her breasts and kissed around each of them slowly using his tongue liberally. The noises she made assured Harry that he was doing the right thing. He kissed her breasts in circular motions from the outside inward leaving the very erect nipples for last.

Tonks squealed loudly when Harry finally gave in and took as much of her breast into his mouth as he could. The whole time his hands had loosened her pants and worked them to her mid thigh. Tonks was not paying very close attention and was more than willing to be free of them when Harry started tugging.

She managed to regain enough semblance of control to remove Harry's jeans quickly. When her breasts had received adequate attention, Tonks pulled Harry down to the bed and rolled him over. With Tonks in control, she planted kisses all over his body in a similar fashion to what he had done to her.

Harry reveled in the sensations and he fought for control of his own urges. He did his best not to fight Tonks away when she got too close to certain things. When Tonks mouth returned to his, Harry thought he was relatively safe. He was until Tonks' hand slid into his boxers and grabbed him tightly.

Harry opened his eyes and found Tonks gazing at him lustfully. "Nymph, don't you think..."

"Shut up, Harry. I am not thinking right now so just enjoy it." Tonks started moving her hand slowly but firmly. She continued despite Harry's mumbled protests. She only stilled when Harry did the same to her.

His hand moved beneath her panties and found a sensitive spot. Harry started rubbing it slowly with his fingers in time with her own motions. After a few minutes, Harry knew the end was near and forced his eyes open to find Tonks gritting her teeth and breathing rapidly.

"Nymphadora." Harry spoke quietly and watched Tonks open her eyes slowly.

He willed himself into her mind and started moving his hand quickly before she could respond. After a few seconds, Tonks' response was to grip tightly and stroke him quickly. Amongst the swirling colors in his mind, Harry could hear Tonks squealing with each movement. He heard her breathing quicken even more causing her own actions to increase overloading Harry's senses.

With a scream from one and a loud grunt from the other, Harry and Nymphadora collapsed onto each other. Their movements stilled and only their breaths were evidence they remained alive. As the minutes passed, Harry heard a soft coo escape Tonks' puffy and red lips.

"Nymph?"

"Merlin, that was worth it, Harry. If you can do that again, you will never have to worry about me being happy." Tonks gave a shuddered exhale.

"I am glad you liked it, Nymph."

"I loved it, Harry." Tonks smiled weakly and tried to bury her head into Harry's shoulder while squeezing him firmly once more gaining a positive reaction.

"Oh, Nymph, I am not sure you want to do that."

"And why not, Harry?" Tonks opened her eyes and gave him a wicked grin.

Harry moved his fingers back and forth causing her eyes to snap shut and eliciting a moan and shivers from Tonks body. "Because, I will do the same thing to you if you do."

"Promises, promises, Harry." Tonks stretched to give Harry a passionate kiss and proceeded to repeat her earlier actions. Harry couldn't think of anything but doing the same to her.

From her perch, Hedwig blinked her large eyes twice then nestled her head under her wing intending to sleep until earlier in the morning before going hunting. It was some time before the snowy white owl

managed to fall asleep. Her owner and friend weren't very considerate that night.

7. What A Wonderful Mess

The hazy morning light filtered into Harry's room fighting away the darkness. Hedwig fluffed her wings nosily and waited for Harry to wake up. Her owner slept on wrapped up with his friend. Undaunted, Hedwig hopped out of her cage and took flight. She swooped around the room a few times and came to rest on the bed.

She bobbed her head a few times trying to wake up Harry. Failing again, Hedwig flittered further up the bed and stopped when she landed on Harry's shoulder. From her position, her tail feathers were covering Tonks' head completely. Hedwig nudged Harry's head getting no response. She made a noise that could only be deciphered as frustration.

The snowy owl nipped at her owner's ear and finally saw a stirring. She repeated the action two more times before she saw green orbs revealed by their opening eyelids. Hedwig gave Harry the unhappiest look and waited for a response.

"Hedwig?" Harry asked softly. "How did I slight you today, girl?" The owl held his gaze. "You have food and water. The window is open. What?" He received a blank stare in answer. "I have ignored you, haven't I?"

For the first time, Hedwig moved and cuffed his head with her wing. "I am sorry, girl. We can go to the park today and you and I can play. How does that sound?" Hedwig closed her eyes and hopped into the air and settled on her cage.

"You are so whipped, Harry," called a sweet voice muffled by the pillow.

"What do you mean, Nymph?"

"Hedwig has you wrapped around her...wing. She chirps; you ask how high. You are so adorable with her."

"Glad you approve, Nymph." Harry buried his head into her neck and gave her a kiss and started nibbling lightly.

Tonks arched her back and wiggled a little in response. "Oh, Harry, I like that you know." Tonks giggled softly as she pressed herself into Harry. The minutes passed as Harry kissed and touched Tonks in various places earning the same attention in return.

Returning from a quick trip to the loo, Harry entered his room to find Tonks reading Sirius's journal. Harry looked on eagerly awaiting his chance to read the contents.

"It will be worth the wait, Harry. I promise. I knew Sirius was out of control, but this is something completely over the top."

"Well, hurry up, Nymph. I am not getting any younger here."

"Thank Merlin for that, Harry, or I would be in some serious trouble."

"Back to my age again, Nymphie?"

"Hey, that is name is off limits, sexy. You stick with the others or no more fun for you." Tonks did her best to look resolute on that statement.

"It would work both ways, Nymphadora. If I don't get to have any fun, neither would you."

"Well, bollocks on that then. I am not giving up on you now. I have too much effort put into your."

"I am glad to hear that, Nymph. So, what are the plans for today?"

"Not much, Harry. You have to walk Hedwig or something or she will hate you forever and there is an Order meeting tonight. Otherwise, we have the whole day to ourselves."

Harry nodded and gathered what he thought he would need for the day. He was wearing another new outfit that Tonks had handed him when he left for the bathroom. He mentally checked for his wand, vault keys, the ring for portkeys, and his money pouch which he had shrunk for a better fit in his pocket.

Harry looked around the room and saw Tonks using the mirror to choose a hair style and color for the day. Pink gave way to blue, to red, to blond, to brown, to purple. The purple was a duller purple than normal, but Harry could see the color waiting to appear. Tonks decided to keep her normal style and spun to face Harry. She gave him a winning smile and Harry mentally paused.

"You like it?" Tonks asked brightly.

"I like it, Nymph. Let's go." Hedwig launched from her perch and landed on Harry's shoulder like she had done it a thousand times before. Tonks watched the pair lead the way out of the room and down the stairs to the kitchen. When they entered the room, Harry was glad Hedwig went to sit on the light over the table.

"What in the bloody hell is that pigeon doing in our kitchen?" Vernon bellowed. "It is bad enough the filthy animal stays in your room, but I won't have it in the kitchen. No sir."

"Hedwig is cleaner than you are, Vernon," Harry spoke clearly. "She goes where I go. Don't like that, too bad." Harry continued to the cooker and found that some food remained from earlier.

Harry split the food into equal portions on two plates and made his way to the table where Tonks had taken a seat next to Petunia, who was trying to scoot her chair away, and Dudley, who's eyes never ventured further than her chest. With a sigh, Harry moved an extra chair into the gap next to Tonks.

"Keep your eyes to themselves, Dud, or you might lose them."

Vernon almost yelled at Harry for threatening his clone-of-a-son until he saw that Dudley's eyes were locked onto Tonks' chest. He quickly cleared his throat gaining his son's attention.

"That is better. Remember that for next time, Dud, or I will defend her honour." Harry began eating as did Tonks. When she wasn't eating, she put her hand on Harry's leg and rubbed it.

The Dursley's watched everything and two of them looked appalled while the last one looked hopeful. They were nearly finished when

another owl entered the open window and landed on the edge of the table. It had a letter attached to its leg and it waited to be relieved of its burden.

"More owls," Vernon snapped. "No more owls, I am done with them."

Harry silenced Vernon wandlessly and removed the letter and gave the owl a bit of his bacon. It ate the offered food and took flight joining Hedwig on the light. Vernon went still when he realized what had happened. He was afraid of worse things should he continue with his outburst. Harry unrolled the letter and the included article. He gazed at the letter and sighed loudly.

"What is it, Harry?" Tonks asked not sure she really wanted to know.

Silently, Harry handed her the letter.

Harry,

I told you nothing good would come of it. It seems that idiot didn't learn his lesson the last time. Please be safe, son.

Oh, and the owl is Perman. We needed to retire Errol in the worst way, poor thing.

With love, Molly

The article was a cut out of the Daily Prophet.

Harry Potter Not Fan Of Fudge?

"Yesterday, Harry Potter attended the will reading of Sirius Black. Also in attendance, were a few selected others including Albus Dumbledore and Minister Fudge. We at the Prophet learned that Harry objected to the presence of the Minister and had him removed from the reading as was his right as the primary beneficiary.

"Reports say that the Minister challenged his removal, but his request was dismissed quickly by Director Ragnok in accordance with the rules governing will readings. Harry supposedly challenged the Minister and made certain threats against him.

“The Minister refutes our account of the meeting between the two stating, ‘Mr. Potter and I have mended our past differences and are working together to fight the current problem plaguing our society. I have Harry’s full support.’”

“We would love to hear from Harry Potter on this matter to see what he has to say on this situation. Our readers should be aware that, with the inclusion of the Black estate, Harry Potter is now one of the richest wizards in the world. A current tally is not available and our requests to Gringotts have been refused by Director Ragnok himself.”

Tonks finished reading and looked to find Harry concentrating intently. A few seconds later, a quill and a piece of parchment flew through the door and were caught by Harry’s quick movements. He started writing with an angry flourish and paused now and then to think through something before writing it down.

Tonks watched and waited until Harry was done. He asked Perman to deliver his letter to Gringotts immediately. The owl did as asked and left the kitchen quickly. Harry took a deep breath and calmed himself. He noticed how Hedwig was reacting and called her down as well.

“Sorry, girl, but we have plans for today. That letter wasn’t that important.” Hedwig puffed out her feathers in an attempt to make herself look more important. Harry offered her a much larger piece of his bacon, a bit of toast, and some of his juice. Petunia scowled at the actions of her nephew.

“Harry, what did you do?” Tonks asked softly and saw Harry grow angry again.

“I did what I should have done yesterday. I just asked Ragnok to tell me everything he has on Fudge. I guess Fudge has never been a fan of goblins and the feeling is mutual. I intend to remove him from office. How dare he say I support him. The pompous arse won’t know what hit him.”

“Look at you all fired up at the Minister of Magic, such as he is. You go get him, Harry.”

"What have you done to my husband?" Choked out Petunia.

Harry turned to look at Vernon and saw him turning red from fury. "I silenced him when he was raging about the owls. Hedwig doesn't like loud noises especially from Vernon." Harry went back to eating his food and stroking Hedwig now and then.

"Could you fix him?" Petunia asked quietly knowing that yelling wouldn't get her anywhere. Harry looked up and removed the spell.

"Yell like that again and I will leave that spell in place for a few days, Vernon." Harry made eye contact and held it for a few seconds before returning to what was left of his breakfast.

"What Minister were you talking about?" Dudley asked refusing to look at Harry.

"Minister of Magic," Harry answered between bites.

"You can just remove a Minister like that?" Petunia questioned. "It is that easy? What kind of government do you people have anyway?"

Harry kept quiet and proceeded to finish his food and pet Hedwig.

"For the most part, we are just like the muggle system," Tonks offered. "The thing is, Harry kind of carries public opinion right now and he can back it up. If the goblins join him, then Fudge is sure to be out. After last year, Fudge won't be hard to remove."

"How can you carry anything, boy?" Vernon blustered. He shrunk when he met Harry's gaze.

"Harry can do pretty much whatever he wants, fatso," Tonks replied. "He is Harry Potter after all." The confusion on Vernon's face remained until Tonks stood to leave the kitchen with Harry and Hedwig who led the way.

"What does that rubbish mean? He is Harry Potter after all. What kind of codswallop is that?" Vernon wanted answers to his questions.

“He is a hero in our world and everyone knows who he is,” Tonks said. “You are looking at one of our most famous people and he can make a lot happen if he wants.”

Harry hastily led the way out of Number Four with Hedwig on his shoulder. Tonks caught up and they headed to the park. Hedwig took flight after a few houses and soared ahead. Harry looked at the haze that hung in the air and wondered if that was how the rest of the day was going to be.

“Did I do the right thing, Nymph? Is ousting Fudge the right thing to do now? Did I just stuff up the war effort that much more by getting mad?” Harry watched the cracks in the sidewalk move beneath him as he mindlessly walked to the park.

“Fudge is an idiot that needs to be removed, Harry. You did what you thought was right and honestly I think it is the right thing to do. He isn’t the leader we need right now. He can’t be effective with his job sitting so precariously. A leader needs to have leverage over others to make things happen. Not that Fudge ever did the right thing mind you, but it is a fact.”

“Ragnok told me yesterday that Fudge has been trying to make the goblins’ lives more difficult for years. He has either sponsored or supported every single law that restricts what they can do since he got into the Ministry. Ragnok told me he has tried to reason with Fudge over the years, but our git of a minister won’t listen.

“I just want to be left alone, Nymph. That is all I have ever wanted. The Ministry, Fudge, the Prophet, Voldemort, the Death Eaters; I just want them to leave me be. Is it too much to ask for that? Is my life so cursed that I will never have that?”

Tonks put an arm around Harry and hugged him tightly. She cooed in his ear softly trying to calm him. “You dictate your own life, Harry. You are your own man now.” Tonks held him as his body relaxed in her embrace. With a quick kiss on his cheek, Tonks said, “Except for the part that I dictate.” She smiled widely as she pulled back and nudged him forward.

Harry chuckled lightly but kept his head down the remaining distance to the park. When they entered the gate to the park, Hedwig flew down from her perch in one of the trees. Tonks followed her flight around the park as she flew up behind Harry who seemed to be lost in thought.

At the last second, Harry held his left arm up and Hedwig landed perfectly as if they had coordinated the whole thing. Tonks watched Harry stroke her softly in a loving way. Hedwig moved around so Harry would rub the spots she wanted. Tonks could see Harry's lips moving, but she couldn't hear the words he was saying.

She watched how the two companions bonded. She could see Hedwig controlled the majority of their friendship. Tonks had seen the owl get Harry to do things he never would have for someone else. She had seen how Hedwig kept a close eye on Harry when he moved about his room. She knew that she had also seen the snowy owl following them when they went to dinner the night before and around the neighborhood a few other times in the last week too.

At that moment, Harry lifted his arm and Hedwig took to the air pumping her wings a few times to gain altitude. She floated around the open area in a few lazy circles before heading north over the trees. Tonks looked to Harry and saw him following his owl with a lost look and a loving smile on his face.

"You love her, don't you?" Tonks asked softly.

"She was my first true friend, Nymph. She is the only one who has been with me both at school and here. She doesn't care if I am famous or unknown, hated or adored. She has no expectations more than a little care and attention now and then. If I stuff things up, she lets me know right away and you know she won't give in." Harry caught sight of a brighter white in the sky when Hedwig flew in front of a chimney.

"Do I love her? If I knew what love felt like, I might be able to answer that question, Nymph. I know that I would do anything to keep her safe if she was in danger."

"Do you think that way about anyone else, Harry?"

“Sure I do. Ron, Hermione, Molly and Arthur, the rest of the Weasleys I guess, you. I would do whatever I had to do to keep everyone safe. I have so few real friends that I want to keep the ones I already have. Is that what love is?”

“It is whatever you make of it, Harry. Everyone is different, but you should be used to that comment by now. Love is the most confusing thing in the world. It is the greatest and worst thing as well. All I can say is that you will know it when you feel it. The rest is up to you to figure out. Now, what are we going to do now?”

“Well, Hedwig is about ten seconds away from landing on me so you better wait on doing anything right now.” Tonks counted the time and at ten, Hedwig landed on Harry’s arm again.

“How did you know that she would do that?”

“It is the same every time we do this. She flies the same pattern and for the same amount of time. I am not sure why, but that is what she does. I knew what she was doing by how she took off. Hedwig has two other routines that she likes, but she takes off differently for them.” Harry stared at his owl and caressed her soft feathers.

Tonks was captivated by the exchange between the two. She had an owl since she was in school, but they had never bonded like that. Tonks let her owl do his thing when he wanted and he always showed up in the morning for letters. *‘I have yet to see anything normal about him. Not one thing is the same as another. He can’t even own an owl like most people.’*

Hedwig took off again. “She will fly to the left, then the right a few times. Then she will do spirals before doing a fly by and circling around to land on my right shoulder,” Harry spoke as if he was reading from a book and not describing what an animal was going to do.

Sure enough, Hedwig did exactly as Harry had predicted. Tonks could only shake her head a few times in surprise. When Hedwig took off again, Harry turned to Tonks.

“She is doing her own thing now,” Harry said simply. “What would you like to do, Nymphadora?”

“I would like to sit under the tree, dear sir.” Tonks grabbed Harry’s hand and pulled him over to a gathering of trees to the side of the park. Harry sat down first and Tonks followed him in an uncontrolled way. She ended up sitting on him rather than next to him. With a perky smile, Tonks kissed Harry forcefully.

The snog session continued for an hour or so as the haze remained hanging over Surrey. Tonks had pulled away to look into Harry’s eyes when movement drew his attention away from the sexy creature in his lap. Harry watched as people moved along the far fence line toward the other entrance.

The people emerged from behind the bushes and Harry saw that it was Emma, Jonathan, and Cathy Williams. He smiled when he saw the purple cast on her arm covered in writings and drawings. Tonks couldn’t help but smile at Harry’s reaction.

Tonks slid off of Harry and stood up brushing the grass from her pants. Harry stood up and unconsciously ran a hand through his hair. Emma ran ahead of the others and stopped short of hitting Harry at the knees.

“Hi, Harry,” called the little girl.

“Why, hello, Emma,” replied Harry offering his hand in a gentlemanly way. “How are you today?”

“I’m fine. Mum wanted me to come back here so I could, what was it, overcome my demands or something like that.”

“Demons, maybe?”

“Yeah, that is it. Demons. There aren’t really demons here, are there?” Asked Emma looking around the park quickly.

“Nah, I scared them all away for you.” Harry smiled and nodded to Cathy and smiled at Jonathan. “Pleasure to meet you again, Mrs. Williams.”

“Harry, it is Cathy,” she smiled at Harry warmly and gave Tonks a quick once over before the smile returned. “Not the best weather we have had, but it is Britain after all. What are you two doing today?”

“We were enjoying our Sunday, Cathy,” Tonks replied. “Emma here to get back on the horse, then?”

“Yes, she is,” Cathy answered laying her hand on her daughter’s head. “Have to turn the other cheek on something like this. Can’t let one bad experience beat you.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Tonks said elbowing Harry in the ribs.

“What?” Harry asked Tonks. “Anyway, I was just spending the morning with Tonks and Hedwig.”

“What’s a Hedwig?” Emma asked showing a very confused look on her face.

“I’ll show you,” Harry answered. “Hedwig!” Harry called out and waited for her to arrive. A rustle in the far tree revealed her location and she flew out of the dense cover. She circled the group twice and dive-bombed Harry but pulled up in the last second spreading her wings wide to slow herself.

Emma and Cathy ducked when the large owl flew at them. They watched the beautiful bird come to rest on Harry’s shoulder perfectly. Emma was bouncing with excitement and Cathy was speechless at being so close to a real owl outside of a zoo.

“Hedwig,” Harry introduced, “this is Emma, Cathy, and Jonathan. Everyone, this is Hedwig.”

Emma hopped forward and reached out to touch the owl. Cathy went to grab her hand away, but Harry lowered himself quick enough showing it was okay. Jonathan came forward next and Cathy did so last.

“She is a snowy owl and we have been friends for about five years now,” Harry explained.

“What kind of name is Hedwig for a girl?” Emma asked.

Harry hesitated and looked at Hedwig. She turned her head to him and titled it expectantly. “Um, well, it just kind of came to mind when I got her. I am not sure other than that. If I say anything more, she might get mad at me so I won’t.”

“Harry isn’t joking,” Tonks added. “Hedwig will let you know if she is mad and Harry folds like baby when she does.” Tonks laughed at Harry as he shook his head and made a face.

“I am smart for not trying to fight her, Tonks. You have never been on her bad side. It is not pleasant.” Harry let everyone pet Hedwig before he stood up and let her fly off to her perch in the tree.

“Aren’t you afraid she will fly away?” Emma asked.

“Nope,” Harry answered. “Hedwig knows her way home and I think she likes me enough to stick around.”

“An owl as a pet?” Cathy said quietly. “You have any other surprises, Harry?”

“Maybe one or two more, Cathy,” Harry replied coyly. “But I am not telling. Tonks burst into laughter and nearly fell over.

“What did I miss?” Cathy asked.

Harry scowled at Tonks and turned his attention to Emma. He reached a hand out, which she quickly grabbed, and led her over to the play park equipment. Jonathan followed but he was giving Tonks a few odd looks not sure what to make of the woman who was laughing uncontrollably.

“What did I miss, Ms. Tonks?” Cathy wanted to know if it was her or what she had said.

“It was Harry saying he had one or two surprises,” Tonks forced out gaining some control of herself. “If that isn’t the biggest understatement I have ever heard. He surprises me two or three

times a day and I know him.” Tonks couldn’t stop most of the giggles from continuing.

“Well, he is not your normal teenager, is he?” Cathy asked watching the young man in question push her daughter on the swing.

“Normal is not a word that has ever been used to describe Harry,” Tonks explained, “except when he is doing the describing of course. Look at him. You could not tell by seeing him, but he has never been around children before that were younger than himself outside of school. That alone is surprising considering how he is with Emma and Jonathan.”

Cathy watched Harry move about the park assisting both of her children when they needed it. He always seemed to be in the right place at the right time. “Surprising, yes,” Cathy said mostly to herself.

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” Tonks chimed. “And those kisses...” Tonks’ sentence drifted off as did her thoughts.

“He is still a child, Ms. Tonks,” Cathy assumed the voice of a disapproving mother.

“Cathy, Harry hasn’t been a child since he was one year old,” Tonks said mournfully. “Every year since then has reinforced that fact. If I had to gauge Harry’s age most of the time, I would put it somewhere around forty. All the things he has been through. It would make you cry for days for him. Yet, there he is playing with your children trying to live a carefree life through them...If only it was that simple.”

Cathy looked from Harry to Tonks and saw the true sorrow written on her face. “How bad has it been? He is ‘only’ fifteen after all.”

Tonks shook her head slowly. “I can’t even begin to tell you. Some you can’t know, others you wouldn’t want to know, and a few even I don’t know. He has seen more than I and that is saying something.” Tonks turned to Cathy and weighed her opinion of the woman. “Have you ever seen death, Cathy?”

The shocked and surprised woman shook her head slowly. "I have seen my grandmother pass, but I don't think that is what you are getting at, is it?"

Tonks dropped her head in a defeated way. "Harry has seen death, far too many actually. He has looked into the face of a murderer, a few of them, and held his ground while others would have run screaming. He has fought for his life and the lives of his friends too many times. I know one thing about Harry that many don't know. As fragile as he may look, as quiet mannered as he seems; I will never stand against Harry. To do so would be your own folly."

"How can someone so young go through all that?" Cathy asked the first thing that came to mind. "How can I not have heard about that? You know little escapes the press."

Tonks barked out a laugh. "You have to know what to read first of all. Secondly, Harry either finds himself the center of the happenings or he puts himself there. That is just how he is."

"You care about him, don't you?" Cathy asked simply.

"Most definitely, I do," Tonks replied. "How could you not once you get to know the real Harry."

"Do I know the real Harry?" Cathy pondered.

"Yes," Tonks said pointing towards the group of three. "He is right there."

Cathy looked from Tonks to Harry and saw that he was holding Emma's hand trying to get her on the see-saw. It was the place she had gotten hurt a few days ago. The mother in her wanted to go console her daughter, but the adult in her forced her to remain where she was. She watched the fear in her daughter's eyes grow. She saw Emma wrap her arms around Harry's legs in protest. She watched Harry lower himself and speak with Emma.

Emma's face slowly changed from fear to determination. Her little girl turned away from Harry and stared at the see-saw. She held her left hand up and Harry grabbed onto it. Emboldened, Emma stepped

towards the see-saw and sat on it. Harry slowly removed his hand and went to the opposite side and started working the toy. Her daughter's smile grew with every cycle.

"That is the real Harry, Cathy," Tonks said softly. "How can you not care about him? How could I not fall in...How could I not do anything for him? You want a real hero in the world, you are looking at him."

"It took me this long to even get her to come to the park," Cathy spoke with a slight amount of awe to her voice. "She sees him and she forgets her fear. She didn't even hesitate in running to him. He got her on that thing and she never doubted him. How does he do that?"

"That is another one of his surprises," Tonks supplied. "So that is two in the last what, fifteen minutes? And he told you that he only had one or two left. Now you see why I was laughing so hard. He can't help himself. He is who he is."

Cathy watched how Harry worked with Emma and included Jonathan when it was possible. "I see what you mean, Ms. Tonks. I wish you both well in your life. I hope things get better for him."

"It's Tonks and you aren't the only one hoping for that. I know a whole group of people wanting the same thing. I am afraid that his life will never be boring enough for his wishes. If it isn't one thing, it will be another that much is guaranteed."

The morning gave way to early afternoon and the Williams's had to go home for lunch. Harry politely refused the offers to join them and remained with Tonks. Harry settled against the tree again, and Tonks returned to her original position in his lap.

"Miss me?" Tonks asked cheekily.

"Not really," Harry said earning himself a slug to the arm. "Hey! I was in the company of another cute girl. There is no reason to get violent." Harry rubbed his arm while fighting his smile.

"You were brilliant with her, you know. Cathy was so happy. You are a natural when it comes to children."

“Funny, that, since I never really was one.” Harry started looking depressed.

Tonks leapt at the chance to change his mood and kissed him passionately. She snogged him in every way she could think of and even a few that she hadn’t. The flap of wings broke their embrace as Hedwig landed on a branch above them. She hooted a few times to get Harry’s attention.

“Yes, Girl,” Harry said. “It is your day after all.” Harry gave Tonks a peck on the lips and urged her off so he could stand up. When he did, Hedwig flew down and landed on his outstretched arm. After a few pets, Harry tossed Hedwig into the air and followed her movements with his eyes.

“How do you know what she wants?”

“After a time, you learn or she nips your hand until you figure it out. She is a slave driver when she wants to be, but I wouldn’t trade her for anything.”

It was nearly two o’clock when Hedwig landed and Harry knew she was done for the day.

“I am hungry,” Harry said. “How about you?”

“Same. Where to?”

“Let’s go get the motorbike and then we can find someplace to eat. I really don’t feel like dealing with ‘them’ again today.”

“That sounds like a plan.” Tonks ruffled Harry’s hair a little and jumped ahead leading the way back to the Dursleys’. Harry, with Hedwig, followed.

When they arrived at Number Four, Harry hefted Hedwig into the air and she flew in the open bedroom window. Harry walked to where the bike was parked and took up the driver’s position. Tonks joined him from behind. Harry started the bike and they roared out of the driveway and down the street gaining quite a lot of attention from Mrs. Number Seven in the process as she stared out of her front window.

A very short ways out of Little Whinging, Harry felt a thump on his chest and saw a finger point to a deli indicating that he should stop there. Harry slowed and parked the bike then helped Tonks off.

Being the gentleman that he was, Harry bowed and swept an arm to the front of the business as Tonks walked by. She gave him a coy smirk and walked on. She never saw Harry come up behind her and grab both of her sides until it was too late. It took them at least five minutes to walk the final thirty feet to the restaurant.

The couple drove around the neighboring area for the remainder of the day. The haze had abated somewhat, but it still hung around for the most part diffusing the sunlight. Harry learned his way around Surrey and the surrounding towns in one afternoon. During a break at a nearby park, Tonks received a message spell from Dumbledore.

“Harry, guess what?”

“What?”

“Albus would like me to bring you to the Order meeting tonight. What do you think this is about?”

“Knowing him, he probably wants a chance to corner me and get information out of me. That or he wants to yell at me for yesterday. Either way, I don’t really care. I am not going to apologize or back down. He owes me too much for what he has done. I hope he understands that.”

“He isn’t your real enemy, Harry. Please remember that tonight. Now, it is around five so unless we are going to use magic to get there, we should start on our way now. I can direct you when we get closer to headquarters, but until then I will have to use Point Me. Think, you showing up on this thing should cause enough mayhem for the rest of the day. How much fun will that be?” Tonks’ smile turned evil looking.

“You are a bad influence, Nymph. You know that, right?”

“I am only following orders, Harry. I have certain expectations to meet, and I plan to do so.”

“Alright, let’s go Nymph.”

Harry turned left at the next major road and Tonks directed him with her wand. The journey took them a fair amount of time and a few wrong turns that didn’t go through as hoped. At the beginning, Harry tried to memorize the street names he took, but after the twelfth street, he gave up and just concentrated on driving. They were cut off twice and only Harry’s reflexes saved them from crashing.

At one point, a police car followed them for a few blocks, but Harry stayed within the law of the road and the car turned off. As the neighborhoods became nicer, then rougher, then nasty; Harry figured they were getting close. He knew they were nearby when Tonks stowed her wand and started directing him with more confidence. The familiar rundown homes told Harry that he was on the correct street.

The street sign had been torn off the corner post so Harry didn’t know for absolute certainty until Tonks tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the house numbers. Eighteen, sixteen, fourteen, ten; Harry pulled the bike to the curb and shut off the engine. He dismounted and assisted Tonks.

“No matter what happens, Harry, please keep your temper,” Tonks pleaded. “I know you will want to kick some arse, but don’t. You can yell, throw things, even hit them, but do not use magic. That is something you need to keep hidden as long as possible. Remember, I am here and I will help you when I can or when I have to. Oh, and if Snape gets in your face, smack him. He can’t do anything to you with all of us around. Spy or no, he doesn’t have many friends here.”

“I will do my best, but no promises, Nymph.” Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them again. “I will not use magic on purpose, but if they get to me too much I am not sure what will happen.”

“If you lose it here, Horace will kick your arse tomorrow. If that isn’t enough motivation, then I won’t sleep in your bed tonight. How you do like that?”

“Not much, Nymphadora,” Harry said. “I will do my best.”

"Then you will be fine, Harry. Your best is so much better than anyone else's. Now what do you say we go get yelled at?"

"Sounds like fun," Harry said offhandedly. "Nothing new there at least."

Harry concentrated on Number Twelve Grimmauld Place and the house appeared between two other dilapidated homes. Harry kept walking up to the door and knocked lightly. Tonks joined him on the front step, placed a hand on his back, and started rubbing it softly. The front door opened after numerous locks were thrown open. Molly's head appeared and she broke into a forced smile.

"Harry," Molly said with a hushed voice. "What was that noise we heard? It sounded like the twins were messing about out here."

"That was my motorbike, Mrs. Weasley." Harry waited for the reaction he was expecting. He got it and then some.

Molly pulled him in the house and Tonks followed closely. The door was thrown closed and one lock was secured. Molly put a hand in the small of each of their backs and hustled them into the partially filled living room. Molly gave a shove and both newcomers were sent in the direction of a couch.

"What in the world did you think you were doing, Tonks?" Molly raged. "Driving that deathtrap all the way here from Surrey, Harry could have been hurt or worse. You are an auror and should know about safety not to mention how much noise that thing makes. How could you take a risk like that? I am waiting, young woman."

"I was driving, Mrs. Weasley and it was my idea," Harry said evenly. He looked around the room and saw the twins, Ron, Ginny, Arthur, Bill, Hagrid, and a few others standing in the back of the room. Remus was directly across from Harry and Tonks, sitting on the other couch, wearing a large grin. "If you are going to yell, yell at me."

Molly seemed to deflate, but it was clear she wanted to continue yelling. "Harry, that thing is dangerous. You really should just sell it. You could probably get a new broom or something."

"I already have a good broom, Mrs. Weasley, and I like the motorbike. It is great fun and I am not going to sell it."

"Harry, please, think of your safety," Molly was becoming less angry and more concerned.

"I am as safe as you can be with Voldemort after you." Harry watched the shivers spread around the room and sighed internally. "Ron, Ginny, Twins."

"Harry!" They chimed at once.

"The meeting will be a little delayed," Remus said. "I believe Severus couldn't get away until later. Why don't you tell us how your summer has been so far, Harry."

Harry looked right into Remus's eyes. "Enlightening, Remus." Harry scanned the room once more and found hesitant looks on the faces of his friends. "How has your summer been so far?"

"Not bad, Harry," Ron said.

"Good for the most part, Harry," Ginny replied.

"Smashing, Mr. Potter," Fred responded.

"You should come by the store, Mr. Potter," George said. "You might see something worth putting your money into."

Molly scowled and crossed her arms. Remus laughed as did Ron and Ginny. Tonks giggled. "Maybe I will, George."

"Enough of that talk," Molly interrupted. "Why don't you kids go up stairs and visit." They stood up and turned to go up the stairs. Tonks was stopped by Molly's hand. "You should stay, Tonks."

"If you are going to yell at her, then I am staying," Harry spoke. "She did nothing wrong and you need to understand that."

"Harry," Molly placated, "Tonks is the adult here and she knows better than to let something like this happen."

"I made it happen, Mrs. Weasley, and there is nothing more to it. Leave Tonks out of this."

"Oh, Harry, you are still a child and she is not," Molly seemed to deflate.

"I am as much an adult as anyone else, am I not?" Harry challenged.

Molly went quiet as Arthur placed a hand on her shoulder. "Sadly, yes, Harry," Arthur answered slowly with regret. "Molly just needs time to get used to that fact. What is done is done, right dear. No more yelling tonight."

Under his breath, Harry said, "yeah right." His friends heard him clearly enough. They resumed their trip upstairs and Tonks remained behind with a determined glare. "Tonks?"

"I am fine, Harry," Tonks said. "Don't worry about me. If I need help, I will get you." She waved them on and Harry hesitantly walked away. They went up the stairs and turned into the room that Ron and Harry had shared last summer.

"Well done, Harry," Fred announced.

"Really well played, Harry," George said. "You have to get in front of mum before she gets going."

"Otherwise," Fred chimed in, "she will go on and on."

"Stop it," Ginny said. "You two are annoying when you do that."

"How about when we do this, sis?" Fred asked as he messed up her hair and knocked her back on the bed.

"Fred!" Ginny snapped from under her hair. "I know where the money came from so you better be nice to me."

"What was that little sister?" George asked.

"Are you threatening us?" Fred seconded.

"I am making a statement," Ginny answered while sitting up. "Take it however you want to. I know and mum doesn't know...yet."

Fred and George shared a startled look. "You wouldn't."

"You don't hate us that much?"

"We love you like a sister."

"Since you are one."

"And you treat me the same, too," Ginny added.

"We treat you better than Ron at least," Fred retorted.

"Prats," Ron answered.

The sibling squabble continued for some time as Harry watched it. It was like a tennis match that Petunia seemed to enjoy when the neighbors talked about it. She always said that it was a respectable sport played by proper people. His spectating was ruined by one last comment.

"You wouldn't endanger Harry like that," Fred said. "You like him too much."

"As you saw for yourself," Ginny answered. "Harry can take care of himself when it comes to mum. You know she has a soft spot for him."

"I was referring to the soft spot you have for him, actually," Fred replied then stopped instantly. "Ew, that was all wrong that was."

George paused, and then hit his brother on the head. "Pillock, that's our Gin-Gin you are talking about."

"Sorry, got caught up in the moment," Fred apologized. "Either way, you wouldn't risk Harry like that. He is Harry Potter after all."

"Yeah," George added, "who would save your life next time? If mum kills Harry then he is not an option."

"Hey, how did I get brought into this," Harry asked.

"You gave them the money to start up the business, that is how you got into this," Ginny answered. "Dug your own hole you did."

"Well, they put it to good use at least," Harry replied. "Good for them."

"You gave these two money?" Ron asked confused. "Where did you get it?"

"Oh, Ron, are you that thick?" Ginny questioned. "His own vault or the Triwizard winnings. Either way, it is not like Harry doesn't have the money to give away. You read that article the same as the rest of us."

"Yeah, but Harry would have told me," Ron paused and looked at his best friend. "You have told me, right?"

"You were jealous of me once already that year," Harry said plainly. "I didn't want to risk it again. I gave them one thousand galleons and I was glad to do it. If you need more, let me know. And don't be mad at me, Ron. I really don't need more people mad at me right now especially if they are my friends."

"No worries, mate," Ron said quickly. "Just let me know if you want to get me a really nice Christmas present this year."

Harry smiled widely before he was tackled by one of the twins. The other followed closely behind the first. Harry quickly found himself on the bottom of a Weasley pile. A few shrieks from Ginny and a grunt from Ron signaled that the pile had fallen over onto the floor.

Harry moved a foot out of his face and discovered an armpit had replaced it. He poked lightly getting a response and more movement. Quickly a soft mound of flesh ended up in his face blocking all view of the room. Soon the pile stopped moving and a pair of cackles erupted from the silence.

Harry moved when others were removed from him and the laughter increased. He saw Ginny move off of him and back away turning red. Harry figured out what had happened and pushed away from the group quickly trying to get to his feet. He was 'helped' by Ron.

“That is my sister you were feeling up there, Potter,” Ron said clearly as he grabbed the front of Harry’s shirt balling it up in his fist. “You better apologize to her or I will pound you into the floor.”

Harry looked at Ron and saw the conflicting emotions of pride and humour battling out. He smiled and calmly apologized to the reddening Ginny. The twins’ mouths dropped open when Harry moved around Ron to speak to Ginny.

They stepped forward and pushed Ron away and pulled down on Harry’s shirt. “Where did you get these, Harry?” Fred looked quite angry.

“Did those worthless muggles do this to you?” George asked.

“Do what?” Harry asked completely lost. He looked down and saw that the hickeys from the night before were uncovered. There were many of them and Harry didn’t know how to explain it. “Um...well you see...” Harry started turning bright red.

“Oh, I get it,” Fred said quickly changing his stance. “You got these by choice. I see. So who is the lucky girl, Harry?”

“Anyone we know?” George asked continuing the interrogation.

“Um, maybe, but I am not going to answer any questions,” Harry stated. “I will not say anything about it. Sorry guys.”

“You know that an entire generation or two of women just became insanely jealous of some poor bird, right?” Fred asked.

“She better be able to hold her own or they will tear her apart,” George said shaking his head.

“Our poor Gin my never be the same now,” Fred spoke solemnly shaking his head.

“Sorry, Gin-Gin, it looks like he is taken,” George said sadly. “You will have to find someone else to drool over.”

Ginny looked at the bit of Harry's exposed chest and stilled for a minute. "Like I said, I got over Harry last year." She nodded her head with emphasis. "So, Harry, who is it? Does she make you happy?"

Harry looked around the room and found he was the center of attention. "I am happy and I am still not saying who. She has helped me this summer and I intend to keep it that way. Do not say anything to anyone or they will try to lock me away even more. I have a lot going on right now and I don't need more people in the way. Please don't tell anyone."

"If you are happy, Harry, then I am happy for you," Ginny said. "You deserve some happiness. Now, does Tonks know about her? She has been watching you, hasn't she?"

"She has been watching me and she knows who it is, but she won't say either." Harry calmed himself as he knew he had to speak to Tonks before anyone beat him to it. He started edging his way towards the door so he could be the first one to it should the Weasleys decide to test Tonks' resolve.

"Well, I guess we will have to hope you slip up," Fred said.

"Or better yet," George interjected.

"We drop in to visit you some day," Fred completed.

"Yeah, I would appreciate it if you didn't just drop by," Harry explained. "I hear enough yelling from the Dursleys as is so I don't need anymore thanks."

"Is it really that bad?" Ginny asked.

"Not as bad as before, but they won't change," Harry admitted. "How can they? They have spent too many years hating me for one summer to fix it all. I just can't wait to get out of there for good. At least now, I have a place to go if I have to."

"Really?" Ron spoke up.

“Yeah,” Harry nodded, “here. I own all of it. Lot of good it does me. I would just be exchanging one prison for another. I have other places but I don’t know where or what they are.”

“What terrible problems you have, Harry,” Ginny joked. “Too many houses, not enough time, huh.”

“Something like that,” Harry said.

The conversation became lighter as Ginny infused it with humour and insults directed at the twins. Ron didn’t seem to let Harry’s financial news get to him too much, but he was more subdued than usual. It was a loud room that Tonks found after she escaped the other Order members in the living room.

“Hey, Tonks,” Ginny chirped as the door opened and closed letting Tonks slip in the room.

Tonks smiled and greeted them all as she walked across the room to the small group. She tripped over the throw rug and landed on Harry knocking him to the floor. In the confusion, Harry whispered that she had to refuse to answer their questions.

Tonks slid off of Harry and settled into a sitting position between Harry and Fred. She wasn’t sure what Harry meant, but she quickly found out.

“So, Tonks,” George asked, “who is it?”

“Who is who,” Tonks played dumb.

“You know,” Fred continued. “Who is Harry’s girlfriend?”

“What girlfriend, twin number one?”

“The one who sucked all over Harry’s body,” George finished.

“Harry has some nice marks on him from someone and we want to know who it is?” Ginny asked the real question.

“Harry,” Tonks took up her teacher impression. “Have you been naughty with some innocent girl?”

Harry held his composure and replied, “I don’t think she is all that innocent, Tonks. I am sure she got what she deserved in the end.”

“Oh, you think so, do you?” Tonks queried with a smirk.

“Who is it dear Tonks,” Fred asked.

“We must know,” George added.

“I can’t say,” Tonks shook her head. “I have given my word to Harry not to reveal her identity. Think of the scandal that would fall on her head if the press found out. Scary thoughts I tell you.”

“So you aren’t going to tell?” Ginny asked outright.

“Nope,” Tonks replied. “I will not say who she is. I can say that she is a sweet girl and much too good for Harry, but she likes a project.”

“Project?” Harry shouted. “What kind of project?”

“Now, Harry, be good,” Tonks chided. “I can’t say anymore at this time. Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies.”

“No fun, Tonks,” Fred quipped.

“But this is, brother,” George said right before he pulled out a balloon and launched it at Tonks.

Not thinking, Harry reached out and grabbed the balloon with his hand stopping it from hitting Tonks in the face. The problem was, the balloon exploded in Harry’s hand turning it green and purple as a liquid showered over him and the floor.

“Bollocks, Harry,” Fred yelled.

“That was going to be really funny,” George said.

“Until you show off and grab it,” Fred uttered.

“Poor sport, Harry,” George said while shaking his head.

“How long does this last?” Harry asked.

“Not really sure, Fred answered.

“Had it last up to four hours before, but it varies depending on cooking time,” George explained.

“Tonks, could you clean this stuff off me?” Harry asked.

“I wouldn’t do that, Tonks,” Fred said quickly.

“Gets worse,” George said before Harry could ask.

“Guys, I need this cleaned off before the meeting tonight,” Harry spoke clearly to both of them. “No messing about on this one. I need to be normal for this thing or I am wasting my time.”

The twins looked at each other and nodded at the same time. “Okay, Harry, we will help you out.” Fred drew his wand and started mumbling and waved it all around Harry countering the new colors. After a few minutes, Fred put his wand away and looked at his work.

“It isn’t perfect, but it should be cleared up within the hour,” George said.

“Thank you for helping me out here,” Harry said quietly. “This is my only shot at getting control of my own life this summer.”

“I think we should go down stairs now,” Tonks interjected. “I think Snape was going to be here about now.”

The room cleared out but Tonks held Harry back and closed the door. “Everyone here is an ally, Harry. Please remember that and do not use any magic in front of anyone. Now, let’s go see what is going on.”

“Thank you for helping me out, Nymph. I really appreciate it.” Harry leaned forward and gave Tonks a solid kiss on the lips.

They snogged for a few minutes before breaking away. "I will keep my temper, Nymph, but I will not lay down. I will fight for what is mine."

"I never expected you to lie down, Harry. Now, let's go out there and see what they have in mind for you, sexy."

Harry opened the door and walked out into the hallway with Tonks following him. He heard movement behind them and turned to find Ginny standing in the hallway. She looked surprised but there was something else, Harry figured.

"Ginny," Harry said. "Everything alright?"

"Everything is fine, Harry," she answered. "How about you?"

"I am about to find out, actually."

Harry turned and continued down the stairs. Tonks watched him go before turning to look at Ginny. She raised her eyebrows at the young woman to find Ginny doing the same thing to her.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing much, Nymph," Ginny said with a smirk.

Tonks' smile dropped as she walked right up to Ginny. Tonks looked at her severely. "You are never to utter what you think you heard to anyone until he says it is okay. Do you understand?"

Ginny dropped her joking mood. "I was only having a little fun at you, Tonks. I would never hurt Harry, never."

"I just want to be sure, Ginny," Tonks explained. "Harry is in a very tedious position. He has the ability to become the Harry we know he can become or the Harry we fear he could end up as. I gather that you used some of the twin's products to listen in?" In answer, Ginny pulled out an Extendable Ear. "A Weasley through and through. This will be our little secret then. Tell no one."

"Can I ask one question?" Ginny posed getting a hesitant nod in reply. "Is he a good kisser?"

Tonks face relaxed and she seemed to drift off for a minute before giving a whimsical reply. "You have no idea. It is worth the risk and then some. And the rest is just...Oh I should stop, considering the meeting and all."

"Is it really that good?" Ginny asked acting more like the fourteen-year-old that she was.

"Yep, and don't you dare say a word of it to anyone. Don't even think about it. People can read minds here you know."

"I will do my best, Tonks." Ginny looked very serious when she answered Tonks' request.

"Well, I better get down there before Harry hurts someone like a certain Potions teacher." Tonks walked ahead of Ginny and saw Harry as she descended the stairs. He was leaning up against the door frame and looking into the living room. "You can go in, Harry," Tonks said. "It is yours after all."

"I am not sure I really want to, Tonks. Am I ready to be the Harry I have to be? Will these people accept that person? They are used to controlling my life not letting me live it."

"Enough of this drivel, Harry," Tonks scolded. "Get your sweet arse out there and be who you want to be," Tonks whispered in Harry's ear. "Oh, and Ginny figured it out. More like she eavesdropped and heard, but she knows all the same. Now, go." Tonks gave Harry a nudge in the back and he stepped forward from the doorway.

With the step, Harry calmed his mind and his emotions. It wasn't enough to fight off a Legilimency attack, but it was enough to convince a spectator that he was there with a purpose. Harry walked slowly into the living room looking at every person waiting for the meeting to be called.

Most of them smiled or waved at Harry as he walked into the room. A few watched him with the same level of intent that Harry was giving

them. He took up a position near the fireplace and waited for Dumbledore to arrive and call the meeting. He managed to create a preoccupied air about him causing most of the Order members to give him room and not approach him.

Tonks joined him along the wall and kept up a conversation with Ginny who was not looking in Harry's direction. Most of the conversation was kept at a low volume out of fear of waking Mrs. Black even with the sound reducing spells on the room.

Harry ran through his mental preparations as he waited. He had built up a wall around his thoughts concerning Tonks when the doorbell rang. His resolve was tested immediately as the vile portrait started screeching.

"Mudbloods, scourge of the earth, lesser beings, should all be put to sleep!" Called the horrible woman.

The front door opened and two figures entered the entryway. One cloaked all in black and the other dressed in dark blue. Albus and Snape were the last two members to arrive for the meeting. Molly moved to cover the painting with the drapes, but the screaming woman put up a determined fight.

"Vermin, wretched creatures, out of my house, you are soiling this fine home!" Harry turned to listen to the words being yelled. "Kreacher, remove these evil things from my home! Out, bitch!"

Harry felt his anger escape his tight control for a second. *'How dare that woman call Mrs. Weasley that. I should...No, remember what Nymph said.'* The screaming continued as Albus drew even with the painting.

"My apologies," Albus called over the shouts. "I must have forgotten not to ring the bell." He smiled lightly trying to diffuse the mood as the horrid canvas continued.

Harry couldn't take the way Albus had seemingly apologized. *'He meant to do that. There is no way he could have forgotten about the bell. He is trying to throw me off my target here. I will show him.'*

Harry stepped away from the fireplace and strode towards the still spouting image. Tonks watched the poker fly from its holder and into Harry's hand, but fortunately everyone's attention was directed at the painting.

Harry brought the poker up to a resting position on his shoulder and walked past Remus and Moody who stood near the doorway. "Molly, move!" Harry called out.

Molly stepped sideways and saw Harry looming over her with the poker moving backwards. Albus turned to see Harry standing next to him with the poker already swinging forward.

With a loud scream, Mrs. Black was impaled with the poker wielded by Harry. The wrought iron instrument went through the canvas and into the plaster wall behind it. The tearing sound nearly drowned out the dying noise escaping from the mouth of the painting.

Albus had jumped back when the poker swung in front of his face. He watched the scene with a sad look on his face. "That wasn't necessary, Harry. She was old and set in her ways. This outburst would have passed."

"If it was that easy to shut her up, you should have done it last year, old man," Harry said evenly as he watched the image become less animated. Harry pulled on the poker and drug the hook down the wall until it caught on the frame. Harry gave a tug and the painting ripped from the wall and clattered to the floor as plaster dust gently followed.

With a smirk, Harry stepped forward and picked up the portrait. He turned and walked to the empty fireplace tossing the dying painting into it. He turned to Tonks and nodded authoritatively to her.

A flash of a flame spell erupted from the auror's wand and ignited the fireplace. Harry watched the flames devour Mrs. Black with a slight smile. "That was for you, Sirius. You always wanted to do that and now it is done."

The whole room had fallen silent when Harry had plunged the poker into the painting. Everyone watched and listened to the Boy-Who-Lived as he removed the constant annoyance in the House of Black.

"Harry, why did you do that?" Albus had joined Harry in front of the hearth.

"It needed done and you wouldn't have done it," Harry answered clearly. "You don't seem to be able to make things happen, Professor. Why is that? Are you too careful? Afraid you will let yet another detail slip through."

"I am not sure what you mean, Harry." Albus was looking right into Harry's eyes.

"Voldemort of course," Harry spoke while holding the aged wizard's eyes as well. "You know you should have stopped him before he graduated, right? Inaction seems to be your biggest failing in life. You aren't willing to take the risk. Well, considering my options, I am going to take the risk. I have nothing to lose but my life and that isn't worth very much right now."

"Harry, you know that isn't true," Albus argued.

"I am what you made me, Albus," Harry said quietly. "Remember that when you fall asleep at night. I know I do. I wondered why I was being punished every day since I could remember. I thought I had wronged someone in a past life or something to deserve the Dursleys. Funny thing is you were responsible for it the whole time. Even still I am being punished for having lived that night. You have no idea how many times I wished I had died with my parents."

"Anyway, you could have removed that painting at any time, but you left it for what purpose?" He received no answer from his Headmaster. "As I thought. Now, why am I here?"

Scanning the room and seeing a sea of shocked, surprised, and confused faces; Albus urged everyone into the kitchen who was a member of the Order. Ron and Ginny wore dejected and angry looks when Molly blocked their entrance into the kitchen. The twins just moved to either side and pushed past her. Arthur stopped the outburst before Molly could object vocally.

A quiet conversation led to a sniffling mother being directed into the kitchen by her husband. Harry was pushed into the kitchen by Tonks

and he stood next to the door as the members took their places. Soft murmurs sounded a few times as Harry made eye contact with more than half of the attendees.

“Let us bring this meeting to order,” Albus announced, ending most of the conversations.

“If Potter could refrain from another childish outburst,” began Snape in a very acidic tone. “We might be able to start our meeting. Who knows who could die next time he loses control of his impulses.”

“Severus,” warned Albus, “Please control your normal tendencies.”

“Yes, Snivellus,” Harry called softly, “Do choose your words carefully. I might mistake you for another portrait and the fireplace might not be big enough for you. That would be a shame wouldn’t it?”

Everyone in the room turned to see Harry staring down the hateful man. A few had to look away when they caught sight of the intensity in Harry’s eyes. Even Snape couldn’t prevent his right eyebrow from arching at the challenge. His lip curled as he prepared to insult Harry in kind.

“Severus,” Albus snapped. “You may be under a lot of pressure as of late, but that does not excuse your behavior. Harry, Professor Snape is still your teacher and you will show him the respect he is due.”

“Then he deserves none since he has done nothing to earn my respect in any way, shape, or form,” Harry spoke evenly never removing his eyes from the spy. “He isn’t my teacher either. Never really was much of a teacher to be honest. I know I didn’t get an O in Potions so he won’t be my teacher moving forward. Besides, this is summer break in case you forgot. That makes Snivellus just another bastard in a black cloak and a white mask. Isn’t that right, Snivellus?”

“Why you little, shite,” Snape snapped pulling his wand. “I should have let the Dark Lord...” Snape stopped himself as he caught sight of a few people leaning back in their chairs as Harry drew his wand in a blur of movement besting the speed of Snape’s draw. The tip started glowing red as Harry lowered himself into a fighting stance.

"Yes?" Harry said. "You were saying something about the Dark Tossler? Something like you should have let him, what, kill me? He has tried a few times and he has yet to succeed. What makes you think you could help him get me? Maybe you aren't so much of a spy after all. Maybe you are more of a double agent. You may have Dumbledore fooled, but I think you are evil through and through. People never really change."

"Enough!" Albus yelled. "I will not have this, Harry. Severus has my trust. Severus, you will let go of your animosity towards James Potter. Harry is not him. Now both of you put your wands away or I will take them from you for the duration of the meeting."

"Your's is the only trust Snape has, Professor," Harry said. "He will never have mine."

"Spoken like a true idiot, Potter," Snape retorted.

"You would know, Snivellus," Harry answered finally looking away from the greasy-haired man.

"Harry," Albus said with some level of pleading to his voice. "We are not here for you to challenge Severus's loyalty."

"Then why am I here? You always seem to forget to tell people why they are where they are and for how long. Is that by design or is it a failing of your overburdened mind?"

"You are here so I can ask you if the Order may continue to use Grimmauld Place as our headquarters."

Harry thought through the request. "You may, but on one condition."

Snape snorted but was silenced by a hand wave from Albus. "What is the condition, Harry?"

"I be allowed to join." Harry watched a few members visibly object including Molly and Snape. Most of the others seemed to contemplate the proposal seriously.

“Absolutely not, Harry,” yelled Molly through her hand as it covered her mouth in shock.

“For once, I agree with a Weasley,” seconded Snape.

“Harry, you are still not of-age,” Albus said diplomatically. “I could not in good conscious, allow you to join.”

“Lucky for you, it is not up to you to worry about my status,” Harry said forcefully halting all side conversations. “I will be able to make my own decisions on my sixteenth birthday. Until then, Tonks gets to worry about me as she is my guardian. You didn’t forget what happened yesterday, did you? Your manipulations of my life are coming to an end one way or another, Professor.”

All eyes in the room turned to Tonks who had been standing next to Harry the whole time. “I will permit Harry to join if that is what he wants to do.”

Albus sighed in defeat. “Be that as it may, you are unable to use magic outside of school until you turn seventeen, Harry. You would not be able to go on missions or really help the Order do much of anything.”

“Who said that I wanted to go on missions for the Order?” Harry asked. “From what I know so far, all the Order does is watch the Death Eaters get stronger and kill people, have meetings like this one, and watch me sit at the Dursleys’. I only want to know what is going on. I have no interest in going on your missions. They are a waste of time if you ask me.”

The room went mostly quiet at that admittance. Many of the members thought Harry wanted to participate in their missions. No one really expected he would be willing much less wanting to sit on the sidelines and watch. People were looking at each other having conversations with head nods.

Albus watched the tenor of the room and asked the big question, “And if I refuse your terms?”

"The Order will not be welcome in Grimmauld Place," was the simple reply.

"Delusions of grandeur," Snape said.

"Better than the reality of being pathetic like you, git," Harry retorted. "You are trapped in your own hate for someone who has been dead for nearly fourteen years."

"I believe," Albus interrupted the brewing argument. "The terms are acceptable, Harry. We only need to vote on it as a group. All those in favor..."

Harry looked around the room and saw that Tonks was the first with her hand up quickly followed by the twins. Everyone slowly agreed except for Snape and Molly. Molly was prodded in the back by Arthur until she noticed she was the lone hold out aside from Snape. In the end, she too voted for Harry.

"You are admitted into the Order in a non-active role only, Harry," Albus announced. "You may not participate in missions or actively fight the dark forces unless your life is in danger. Is that understood?"

"I agree with the terms, Professor," Harry accepted. "The Order may continue to use Grimmauld Place for whatever purposes they may need it for as long as I am kept informed of those purposes among other things. You know what I am referring to."

"I believe I do, Harry," Albus admitted. "Thank you for the continued use of this house and welcome to the Order of the Phoenix."

"Yippie," was Harry's bland response.

"Just can't get enough of yourself can you, Potter?" Snape asked.

"I had enough of you after the first class you bastard," Harry replied with a dismissing hand wave.

"Fame going to your head, Potter?" Snape retorted. "You should watch yourself. There are a lot of Death Eaters that are mad at you right now for what happened at the Ministry."

"Well, bully for them," Harry answered then lowered his voice. "Maybe they will do better than their leader. So far, he has been rather impotent in his attempts to kill me. Also, I would try to get control of your emotions. I think your true motives are starting to show."

"Enough!" Albus interrupted. "Gentlemen, we have important business here and trading insults is not on the agenda. Since you are warmed up, Severus, please tell me what is going on with Voldemort and the Inner Circle."

Snape shifted his cloak while he settled his mind. "The Dark Lord has been quiet since the battle at the Ministry. There were rumors that he was not well, but I have no proof of that being the case. The Inner Circle, what remains of it, has also been staying quiet. No meeting has been called and I know of no current plans."

"Interesting information, Severus," Albus commented. "Harry has your scar been active in the last week?"

"No," Harry replied.

"More good news for us," Albus said with a thoughtful look. "I hope that with his last attack on you, Harry, Voldemort has learned that you are not an easy target."

Snape snorted but was silenced with a cross look from Albus. Harry didn't move nor did he comment on the small bit of information supplied by Snape. *'I hope it hurt him as much or more than it did me. I hope he his head hurt for days after that.'*

"Alastor, any news?" Albus asked Mad Eye.

"Nothing, Albus," the aged auror said. "Everything has been quiet."

Albus looked to Kingsley. "I have heard nothing through the auror department. Madam Bones is pushing us hard to find and arrest the Death Eaters. Interrogations of the captured Death Eaters have been on-going since the break-in. Next to nothing has been learned from them. I believe that Amelia is close to calling in the Unspeakables to assist with pressuring the prisoners to reveal what information they know."

“Let us hope that your colleagues are able to uncover the needed information before that is necessary,” Albus added. “Times are such that I fear for the safety of anyone resisting the Ministry.”

“Even the Death Eaters?” Harry asked as neutrally as he could.

“Yes, Harry, even the Death Eaters,” the old wizard said. “The Unspeakables can be quite ruthless in gathering intel.”

“You reap what you sow, Professor,” Harry spoke with indifference.

Albus watched Harry carefully as some members murmured agreement with Harry’s statement. “Even the guilty deserve justice, Harry.”

Harry matched gazes with Albus. “While the innocent receive nothing. I guess I have a more direct view of the situation, Professor. I know what some of those people have done. I have no sympathy for them.”

“As you get older, Harry,” Albus spoke with sadness, “you will see that things aren’t black and white. There are many different levels to every thing that happens. Motivations, circumstances, and details can make a simple event very complex.”

Harry smirked at the man’s words. “If that is how you rationalize your actions or inactions, then I leave you to it. Malfoy deserves nothing but a horrible existence right now. They are all killers. They kill innocent people for fun. I have no sympathy for them or what happens to them.”

“In time, you may, Harry. Please keep an open-mind moving forward in life.” Albus turned his attention to Hagrid who was standing in the far corner trying to fit as best as he could into the rather full room.

Hagrid was looking at Harry with a depressed look on his face. “I have ‘eard nothin’ Dumbledore. Tha forest has been quiet an’ Grawp ain’t ‘eard nothin’ neither.”

“Thank you, Hagrid,” Albus said.

Albus systematically went through the room asking others what they had heard. No new information was revealed. The meeting seemed to wind down as time drug on. Harry grew bored as person after person had nothing to say.

"I would like Tonks, Alastor, Mungdungus, and Severus to stay behind," Albus requested as the meeting was ended.

Harry turned and was the first person to leave the room. He nearly tripped over Ginny and Ron as they scattered away from the door gathering up their listening devices. He looked them in the eyes and found awe, surprise, and a little bit of fear. Harry pushed away his current emotions and continued into the living room taking up a place on the couch.

Ron and Ginny joined him before anyone else left the kitchen. "Bloody hell, Harry!" Ron exclaimed. "You really told off Snape and Dumbledore if you think about it."

"Shush, Ron," Ginny silenced her brother. "Harry, are you okay? That isn't like you."

Harry held Ginny's gaze with his own. He settled himself before speaking. "I am done with those people deciding what happens to me. I am making the decisions now and if they have a problem with that then too bad. Snape is irritating and not a concern of mine."

"Did you really pull your wand on him?" Ron asked with the beginnings of an evil smile on his face.

"He drew first," Harry answered idly. "Next time, I will curse him. I am through taking his shite sitting down. He has no right to do that to me. Git better watch it next time."

The trio continued to discuss the meeting and anything else that came up as the dismissed members left the house. Many came over to shake Harry's hand and congratulate him on his admittance. The remainder waved shyly as they exited.

In the kitchen, Tonks prepared for the real fight she knew was coming. The remaining members were chosen for a reason. Dung kept his

place in the dark corner as Moody sat at the table across from Albus. Snape hovered around the room like the bat he resembled. "Get on with it, Professor."

"Nymphadora," Albus began.

Tonks bristled at the name. "I have asked you never to call me that, Professor. I wish you would respect me enough to refrain from using that blasted name."

"Tonks, then, I have a few questions concerning Harry," the wizard stated. "What happened to him since school let out? Why is he so hostile? Where is he getting his information about certain things? Where is the Harry we used to know?"

"Ha," Tonks started off. "I find it funny to hear you asking those questions. You know well enough the answer to a few of them, but I will humour you anyway. Since school let out, Harry has made some decisions concerning his life. You are beginning to see the results of those choices. Have a good time with that."

"He is hostile because he has been lied to by so many people and you are one of the worst," Tonks continued. "He knows so much right now and he is going to learn all of it soon enough. I suggest full disclosure right now if he will have it. He is getting his information from many places. If there is a place to learn things, Harry has access to those places. If he sets his mind to it, he can find out anything. You should know that considering the last five years of school and what he has figured out."

"Lastly, the Harry you used to know died with Sirius. He is not going to sit back and let others tell him where to go and what to do. He is calling his own shots now and the sooner you accept that, the sooner you might be clued in on what he has planned. I will tell you one thing though. Fudge should have learned his lesson at the reading. Now, I think you should seriously help whoever his replacement is going to be."

"What do you mean, Tonks?" Albus asked.

"Fudge is on his way out," Tonks said happily. "Harry told him and he ignored the opportunity to keep his job. Name me one person who has fought Harry and won. If you think of someone, let me know."

Albus looked to Alastor and Snape. "I fear that Cornelius has pushed young Harry too far. I understand that Harry has a kind of friendship with Ragnok?"

"I will not tell you anymore than I already have concerning Harry," Tonks refused.

"Ragnok and the goblins have stayed neutral with Cornelius at my request thus far," Albus said while in deep thought. "Taking into consideration the events of the reading, I would say that Ragnok has found a new ally in the Wizarding world. Am I correct in my assessment, Tonks?"

Tonks held her composure and said nothing. She looked at Alastor and saw a faint smirk on his lips. Dung was openly smiling and his dreadful teeth shone in the poor light like the yellowed bits they were.

"I have sympathy for poor Cornelius then," Albus commented. "I have angered Harry and been witness to the results. History tells us of the revenge goblins can exact. A merger of the two would be disastrous at this stage of the war. Would Harry listen to my suggestions on the matter?"

"I think you have a long way to go before Harry will even listen to what you have to say about the weather, Professor," Tonks revealed. "I do not know the whole story, but I know enough to understand his feelings are completely justified."

Albus's face fell instantly. "I have made many mistakes in life, and I am afraid most of them have involved Harry. He has confronted me on most of them, thus far, and I can only hope he has as big a heart as I think he does. Sadly, most of the burden lies with him since I can't make him forgive my wrongs. Please express my wishes to him if you will."

"Enough of this hand holding, Headmaster," Snape interrupted. "The boy needs to toughen up if he hopes to survive this conflict. There are

only two sides in this for the living and we are one side. The other is clearly defined.”

“You got lucky, Snape,” Tonks warned. “Harry was about to curse you tonight. I would suggest you never pull your wand on him again. I doubt you will get a second chance.”

“The boy is lucky, that is all,” Snape defended. “His first spell would have been a stunner. Amateurs always use that one first and he is hardly anything more.”

“One day, very soon, Severus,” Tonks added smugly, “you might learn the truth to that scenario. For your sake, I hope you are near a healer when you do.”

Snape paused as the normally juvenile auror spoke with such deliberate intent. He wasn’t sure if it was a joke or if she was serious. His ponderings were cutoff by Albus.

“Tonks, is there something I should know about Harry?”

“I am sure there is,” Tonks said. “But you will have to find them out on your own. Harry is his own person and his trust is a rare commodity lately. I will not jeopardize what I have for your benefit. You know the reality of being Harry Potter better than most. Do you blame him?”

With a sigh, Albus shook his head in a resigned way. “Being Harry Potter is probably one of the hardest things in our world right now. I know many of the challenges he is facing. I have been through many of them myself though I was much older at the time, and I had a support structure that was far more vast than his. Hearing me say those words, I am beginning to understand what Ragnok had meant. He is the future and to stand in his way is folly. My concern for him has blinded me. Much to his detriment.”

“Ego-driven child is what he is,” Snape snapped.

“Enough, Severus,” Albus chided weakly. “I have dug my own hole and now I must try to get out of it without it collapsing in on me. I am at fault here and I know this now. Again, tell Harry if you will Tonks. Now, on to the real reason we are here. I believe your mission of

helping Harry get over the recent death is concluded. I would like to utilize your abilities elsewhere.”

Tonks knew something like this was coming. *‘He was snooping in other people’s heads. He knows something and he wants to know more.’* “I believe Harry is at a point where he could get better or worse quickly. If you leave him to those muggles, I can promise you he will get worse. Maybe to bad to be saved. A person can only take so much.”

“I am working on plans to have Harry moved to the Burrow or here by the end of the month,” Albus admitted.

“That is too long,” Tonks said. “The friction in the house has been increasing since the time I told you about. If it gets too bad, Harry will fight back and where will you be then? He could disappear on you and stay missing you know.”

“Where would he go, Tonks?” Dung asked drunkenly.

“He has two families worth of property to choose from,” Tonks said bluntly. “I think there are a few places he owns where he could go and remain out of your reach.”

“This is the safest place we know of, Tonks,” Albus said.

“Harry cares more about being somewhere he likes than some place safe,” Tonks stated. “He is a Potter and his godfather was Sirius. You know safety isn’t something he worries about in reference to himself.”

“An understatement if ever there was one,” Snape said under his breath.

“You have little room to talk, Severus,” Albus said with a smirk. “You do spend time with a rough crowd, do you not?”

Snape’s mouth drew into a tight line and he crossed his arms forcefully. Dung laughed at the dark man’s actions.

“I know what I saw, Albus,” Mad Eye spoke up. “Potter is not to be discounted. He is all action and he worries about the consequences

later. I see a lot of myself in him and that is scary. We have a fine line to walk here and I for one want to be on the right side of that line. But, enough of this filler, Albus, get on with the real point here.”

“Yes, always the direct one, Alastor,” Albus offered. “I am concerned about how close Harry seems to be with you, Tonks. Yesterday and today, I noticed how Harry seems to depend on you or your counsel. I fear he has simply shifted his grief on to you. I think you should distance yourself from him moving forward.”

“I disagree with your opinion, Albus,” Tonks said evenly. “Harry may appear to depend on me because I will not lie to him. I will answer his questions honestly and without hesitation. He has earned that from all of us. He is handling his grief well because he isn’t alone with those muggles all day. That alone would be enough to drive most people barmy.”

“Still, I think you should be removed from Harry’s detail starting in,” Albus paused appearing to be in deep thought. “Oh a week sounds good. That should give you enough time to get Harry on his own feet before you move on to other things.”

“You are misjudging the situation, Albus,” Tonks said sternly. “I would let Harry decide who he wants guarding him. It would be a good first step towards regaining his trust.”

“I wish it was that easy, Tonks, but it is not. I have to do what is best for Harry.”

“Isn’t that what started everything in the first place?” Tonks asked irritably.

“His safety is paramount and that is what I am trying to ensure. Please, do as I have asked.”

“Harry may not like your decision and I wouldn’t disagree with him,” Tonks replied before turning and leaving the room.

“You have concerns, Mungdungus?” Albus asked.

“Wha, no,” the man replied. “No concerns, ‘ere, Dumbledore.”

"You know that few can lie to me," Albus challenged.

"It is just tha' Tonks been missin' a few changes," Dung seemed to force out while he looked at the floor.

"That is a funny accusation coming from an unreliable crook like you," Snape grated.

"Lik' I said, it just been a few," Dung restated. "I ain't lookin' to get 'er in trouble, but you made me say it Dumbledore."

"That I did, Mungdungus," Albus admitted. "We should be free to speak of our concerns. How many has she missed?"

'Jus' a few. I know I ain't one to talk, but everythin' seems fine. 'Arry is alive and well and tha' is wha' counts. We been doin' a good job."

"Thank you, Mungdungus," Albus dismissed. "Why don't you join the other stragglers in the living room." Dung left the room quickly and once the door closed, Albus looked to Mad Eye.

"Alastor, I want you to check up on Harry and Ms. Tonks from time to time. Things aren't adding up like they should. Mungdungus is hardly one you point out others mistakes considering his own faults, but this issue was weighing on him quite strongly. I never would have pressed him about it if it hadn't been."

"Do you think it wise to monitor them, Albus?" Mad Eye asked. "You saw the same thing I did tonight. Harry is not the same kid he was last year. That look in his eyes was not that of a child. He has seen so much and been through it as well. I am starting to lean in favour of Tonks' suggestion. Tell the boy what his options are and let him decide. The worst that could happen is he picks the least of the choices offered. All would be perfectly safe for him."

"We need him to work with us more closely not farther apart," Albus retorted. "The less control we have the worse his chances are."

"My opinion is known on this subject, Albus," the old auror said.

"As is mine, Headmaster," Snape added.

"I know and I respect both of your opinions, but I feel that giving him everything or nothing is not the best course of action. I will tell Harry what he must know and some of what he wants to know, but there are things that are best left untold at this time."

"I will do as ordered, Albus, but please note my objections to it. Good night." With that, Alastor left the kitchen with a steady thump from his leg.

"The Dark Lord has been too quiet, Headmaster," Snape said in a whisper. "I am starting to believe that the battle was harder on him than he is willing to admit. You must have fought him fiercely to hurt him as he must be."

"I would accept your praise, but I fear I had little to do with it, Severus," Albus confessed. "I believe it was the attempted possession of Harry that injured Tom so. The lack of pain in his scar lends more credibility to that assumption. Tom has always underestimated Harry's abilities. I fear that moving forward, Tom will give Harry his complete attention."

From the hallway outside the room, Tonks removed the Extendable Ear from her own and rolled it up. She adjusted her footing on the stairs as she thought over the implications of what she had overheard. She walked down the stairs and into the living room. *'Yet again, he is underestimated. Maybe you should listen to your own worries, Albus. Harry is going to be seething over this. Spy on us will you?'*

Tonks turned to look at Harry sitting on the couch and saw him laughing half-heartedly with the Weasleys who had stayed to talk. The others were having a great time telling stories of past holidays and family trials. Tonks could tell Harry wanted to laugh with them, but he was thinking of what he missed out with his own family.

"Ready to go, Harry?" Tonks asked cheerfully.

"I guess so, Tonks," Harry answered. "Well, I should leave guys. Stay safe." Harry stood up and passed by Remus who had taken up a position right inside of the doorway.

"Harry," Remus prompted, "could we talk about things soon?"

Harry met his eyes. "Ask Albus what he did to both of us first. Then we can talk about it. I am not the only one he has wronged over the years."

"I will do that, Harry," Remus replied seriously. "It must be pretty serious if you are having this big of a problem with it."

"Once you find out," Harry started saying but couldn't finish as he felt his anger rising too much.

"It is bad, Remus," Tonks said. "Some things are just too much to discuss openly. Well, I need to get Harry home before he turns into a pumpkin. Night all, let's go Harry."

"Pumpkin?" Ron asked. "Why would Harry turn into a pumpkin? I think Tonks has finally morphed her brain."

The door closed and the sound was cut off. Harry took a calming breath as he walked over to the motorbike. He mounted it and reached for the ignition. Tonks joined him and put her head on his shoulder while wrapping her arms around him.

"Get us home quickly," Tonks said. "I need to tell you some things and you aren't going to like them."

"What did they say to you in there?"

"It wasn't what they said to me, really, it was what they said after I left."

Tonks felt Harry tense in her arms. She hugged him tightly as he started the engine and pulled away from the house quickly. Tonks knew that Harry was thinking the worst thoughts he could, but she hadn't figured out how to tell him exactly what was said.

With the hour being late, traffic was far less making the return trip shorter. Harry was letting his frustrations out through his turns and accelerations. When they pulled into the driveway, Harry turned off the engine and leapt off the motorbike.

"What did they say?" Harry demanded.

Tonks swept forward and grabbed his arm directing him to the front door. "Not here, Harry. We are being watched by Dung and most likely another by now." Tonks kept her voice low but loud enough for Harry to hear her.

They entered the house and were met by Vernon before the door had even latched closed. "What in the bloody hell do you think you are doing, Boy?"

Harry wasn't in the mood to deal with his uncle when an unknown problem was waiting for him once he got to his room. "I am not in the mood, Vernon. Get out of the way and let us pass."

"Listen here you ungrateful bastard," Vernon yelled, his veins popping out on his head. "I have had just about enough of you..."

"Well, I have had enough of you," Harry said evenly as he drew his wand and dropped Vernon with a stunner.

The large man crumpled to the floor instantly. A screech from the other room alerted Harry to the fact that his aunt had witnessed Vernon fall. As expected, Petunia ran into the hallway and covered Vernon with her own body.

"What have you done to him?" She screamed.

"Stunned him," Harry said distractedly. "He will wake up in a couple hours. He is still breathing so he is fine. Now leave us be."

Harry pulled on Tonks' hand and led her up the stairs to his room. Once inside, Harry asked what was said.

Tonks stilled him with a hand as she pulled her wand and starting mumbling a spell Harry wasn't familiar with. Once she had walked around the whole room twice, she stopped in front of Harry stowing her wand again. She looked at him in an odd way that Harry had never seen before on her face. It was something he had gotten used to from Hermione though.

"When I was in there, Albus wanted me to distance myself from you. He wants me moved to another Order assignment by the end of next

week.” Tonks watched as Harry grew calm physically but his eyes told a different story.

“He can’t leave well enough alone, can he? Why must I fight for everything in my life? Can’t it just be easy for once?”

“Now comes the bad part.”

“There is a bad part? Bloody hell this just gets worse.” Harry’s eyes continued their fury but it wasn’t close to what they were going to achieve.

“He asked Moody to watch us. He is going to check in on us now and then. To his credit, he wants Albus to tell you everything. Albus isn’t going to, but it seemed like Moody tried to talk some reason into him. At this point, it seems like Moody is just following orders.”

Harry’s stare became lethal after those words. If a sleeping dragon was scary and dangerous, Harry was a whole brood of them in one small package. “I need to get out of here and away from him. There is no other option at this point. He is going too far, again.”

“The spell I just did was an obscuring spell. It is designed to block the monitoring devices we use and what Moody’s eye does. All he will see is a blurry square where the room should be. We are safe while in this room at least. Dung ratted me out, but Albus pressed him on it before he told.”

Harry started to pace the room. He only got a few steps in before he had to turn around and retrace his path. “I will not sit by and let this happen. I must stop this, now.”

“Harry, I said it before, but Albus is not your enemy. He is just a pain in the arse that thinks he is doing the right thing. Fudge is a little worse since he is doing what is best for himself. Keep your focus on this, please.”

“I am tired of people fucking with my life, Nymph. I want it to be my life. Why can’t I get that? Other people have that. Why not me? Am I really that different from everyone else?”

"You are who you are, Harry. You have me as long as you want me. I am not going anywhere. No matter what he says or does, I will be here for you."

"I am afraid you will die just like the rest of them. Anyone who gets close to me, dies. Why is that? Am I cursed to lose everyone I care about?"

"I am here now. I have no intention of leaving. You need to enjoy what you have right now and worry about the rest later. You are young so worry about the big stuff when you get older."

"Aren't I old enough to worry about things now?"

"You are old enough to worry about which girl you take to a dance, where you go to eat for a date, and whether or not you got her preggers the night before." Seeing the shocked look on his face, Tonks smiled seductively. "I see I have your attention."

"You seem to know how to get it, Nymphadora." Harry felt very confused, overwhelmed, and excited all at the same time.

"Enough of the gloom and doom, Harry," Tonks said while stepping forward to wrap her arms around Harry. "Nothing is changing now and I took care of Moody watching us. Let's have a little fun while we can. I would hate to miss out."

Tonks planted a firm kiss on Harry's lips and began the simple process of making him forget all his troubles. She moved him to the bed and followed him down onto the mattress. She wiggled her way up his body slowly as her hands ventured to various places. As the minutes ticked by, Harry found himself in only his underwear and Tonks in her knickers.

"That happened much faster than the last time. Still, I hope we work on our disrobing speed. We are taking much too long for my tastes. Speaking of..." Tonks forced her tongue into Harry's mouth and proceeded to wrestle him for control.

Her breasts were moving over his chest stimulating Harry even more. He needed some way to at least even the odds a little. His hand

moved from her hair, down her back, to her bum. Harry grabbed hold of a cheek and moved her to the side quickly earning him the top position.

Tonks didn't fight and let Harry proceed with every bit of support. She found Harry kissing her mouth, face, neck, and chest. She sighed as she reveled in the attention.

"What are you planning to do, Harry?" Tonks asked during a break in their fun. She arched her eyebrows before looking down at him. Harry followed her eyes and saw exactly what she was looking at.

He became self-conscious and started pulling away from her. Two hands grabbed his shoulders and pulled him down to a waiting mouth and warm body. Harry felt Tonks shift under him and he realized that she was wrapping her legs around his back forcing him closer to her.

With another sigh, Tonks moved again putting Harry right into position to carry out the one thing Tonks had said to get his full attention earlier. Harry stilled as he caught on to what she was offering.

"Nymph, what are you doing?"

"I am doing what I want to do, but you get to make the last decision on this one. I am ready when you are. When ever you want to, just let me know. If you are ready now, then get rid of these clothes so we can continue. I am rather worked up here." Tonks breasts moved in time with her deep breaths.

"I would like too, but I think we should wait a little while longer. I am not sure why, but it just doesn't seem like the right time now."

"That is a first, Harry. I never heard of guy turning down an offer like this. It isn't me, is it?" Tonks put on a mock-worried look.

Harry realized for the first time since they got back that Tonks was her real self again. *'I guess I am getting used to her different looks.'* "I like it when you are the real you."

"Thank you, but stop changing the subject."

"It just doesn't feel right. Not right now. I want to, but something isn't right." When he saw the saddened look move across Tonks' face, Harry forced his mind into hers. He showed her what he was feeling and a soft moan escaped her mouth before his lips covered it again.

Harry snogged Tonks until late in the night. They had played and teased each other until the limits had been broken a few times. Tonks marveled at how talented Harry's fingers and tongue had become in the short time they had been involved. She said as much a few times.

"I have a good teacher and she knows how to motivate me to do my best," Harry said from his position behind Tonks as they were curled up together. "It isn't every day that I enjoy my life and you have made that happen quite a few times lately."

"I aim to please and thank you so much, Harry."

"For what?"

"For doing the same for me in exchange. I haven't had the best luck with men in the past. You are proving that you are better than all the rest. Besides, you are so damn cute I just can't enough of you." Tonks turned over and smiled impishly as she kissed Harry hungrily.

"You are incorrigible, you know that?" Harry loved every minute he spent with Tonks doing what he was doing at that moment.

"I am what I am, Harry. I can't be any other way than like this. You bring out the real me even when I don't want it out."

"I like the real you more than the rest. I can't seem to get enough of you actually."

"Well, here I am nearly starkers and most definitely ready for more."

Harry smiled and began to run his hand down her front once more in an attempt to repeat his earlier actions. He was confident that he could drive her insane within a few minutes as he had done so a few times already that night. He felt very confident until Tonks latched on and returned the favour.

After Harry had left Vernon in a pile on the floor and went upstairs, Petunia called Dudley to help her. She directed her son to heft the limp body of her husband onto the couch. After the shock had left, Dudley did as requested. The grunts and pains from moving such a large person left Dudley very tired and exhausted.

“Mum, what happened to dad?”

“Oh, Dudders,” Petunia started to tell him a lie, but realized that it wouldn’t work anymore. “Your father thought he could stop Harry from doing what he was doing. As you can see, it didn’t work. I have seen magic done, Dudley. I used to watch my sister practice her magic before her last year of school. She was always so intent when she would do a spell. Harry didn’t do that. He just kind of distractedly made it happen. At first, I thought he had killed your father, but he didn’t. The scary thing is, I think he could have very easily.”

“Mum, Harry can’t do that. He couldn’t even kill the worms we studied in school. How could he hurt anyone? He is Harry after all.”

“Did you read that book?”

“No.”

“You should, Diddykins.”

“Will dad be okay?”

“Harry said he would wake up in a few hours so I plan to wait until that happens just to be sure.”

“I am going to go to my room then, mum.”

“Good night, Dudley. Thank you for helping with your father.”

Harry awoke to a knock on the door. He turned over and touched his wand saying, “Time.” He was given the time and it was half three. Harry grumbled and slowly extracted himself from Tonks soft and warm body. He covered her with the sheet and grabbed his cloak to cover his own body. He moved to the door, but Summoned his wand

before opening it. He saw his aunt looking very worried and slightly scared.

“What, aunt Petunia?”

“It has been more than a few hours, Harry. It is many hours more than that. He hasn’t woken up yet.”

“Really? I wonder if it has something to do with him being a muggle.”

“It is because of you Harry,” called the muffled voice of Tonks. “You are more powerful than normal wizards. Go bring him back or he might be like that for hours more.”

“Fine, fine. Where is he?”

“He is on the couch,” Petunia said. “We couldn’t get him upstairs.”

“Alright, I will levitate him into your room and Ennervate him. He may think it was a bad dream or something then. Does that sound good?”

“What ever you will do, Harry.” Petunia tried to steal a look into Harry’s room, but he closed the door when he saw her craning her neck.

“Let’s go.” Harry went down the stairs and into the living room. He saw the lump of human that was his uncle. He levitated the man into the air and directed him up the stairs past his aunt. She gaped at him as he moved up the stairs towards the bedroom. Harry used the levitating body to open the door by pushing it through the opening. Harry moved him over the bed on the sunken side of the mattress and released the spell. His uncle dropped the two inches onto the surface and sunk down into it.

Petunia entered the room and stood by the door. “How did you do that?”

“What, Levitation? It is one of the first spell we are taught.”

“Not the spell. You did it without your wand.”

“Oh,” Harry looked at his hand and saw that his wand wasn’t there. “Yeah, that happens now and then. I seem to have the aptitude for it. So, do you want me to wake him now?” Petunia paused before nodding.

Harry moved to the doorway and got ready to close the door when he revived Vernon. A flash of a spell left his hand and the door closed immediately after. Vernon grunted and snorted a few times before he came to.

“What in the hell happened, Petunia?”

Thinking fast, she asked innocently, “What do you last remember?”

“Bloody boy is the last thing I remember.”

“Then please leave him alone next time. I don’t think he will be this nice next time. He could have hurt you if he wanted to.”

“Harry, what happened?”

Harry slid into the bed and wrapped his arms around the sexy creature sharing it with him. “He didn’t wake up so I put him in his bed and Ennervated him. She can deal with him now.”

“Hmm,” Tonks mumbled as she ground her face into the pillow. “Sleep time now. Talk tomorrow.”

“Yes, Nymph,” Harry whispered in her ear earning a bum wiggle for the trouble.

Two contented people drifted off to sleep while two others seemed to realize the truth of their own situation.

Props to cjcold for the idea with Dung during the meeting. It led nicely into another situation I was going to do

8. Teamwork

Harry awoke to Tonks nudging his side with her elbow. The room was illuminated from what sunlight that could squeeze in-between the heavy rain clouds that threatened to hold for the entire day.

“Harry,” Tonks spoke softly with a flutter to her voice. “We need to get up. This week will mostly be team-based training and you can’t be late.”

“Great. So Horace will have more things to yell at me about. Brilliant.”

“Now, now he means well and you will learn but remember that he knows what he is doing. There is a reason for everything he does and all of it revolves around you and me staying alive in the field. Nothing you will be taught this week will be a waste of time. All of it is critically important to our survival. You aren’t at Hogwarts here; this isn’t for the general masses. This is real situational training at its most intense.”

“Are you supposed to be making me feel better? If so, you are doing a really dreadful job of it, Nymph.”

“Harry, I had teamwork training in the academy before I joined the Unspeakables. I knew how it worked and it was easy to apply that knowledge. You are coming into this pretty lacking in these skills. You aren’t going to like some of the things you are going to be told, but you must do as you are taught. There is a good reason for it. We will follow our training when bad things happen and if you don’t, then everything could fall apart and all of us could be killed.”

Harry closed his eyes and sighed. “On that happy note, I guess I should get up and get ready shouldn’t I?”

“Yes, you should. I will be waiting here for you. Now get going.”

“Fine,” Harry said as he slid out of bed.

They got ready and left the house before running into Vernon. Apparently, he was running late that morning and was dreadfully behind schedule. Harry heard his uncle stomping around on the second floor as they closed the door behind them. Harry portkeyed them into the team room where they met Cal.

"Morning, friends," Cal welcomed Harry and Tonks. "Ready for a wonderful day full of torment and magic?"

"Smashing," Harry drolled out.

"Hey, Ceps, you keep your spirits high or Horace will be worse," Cal warned good-naturedly.

"I'll keep that in mind, Cal," Harry relented.

The day started with Harry, Tonks, and Cal meeting with Horace and Marcus in the training room. The room was empty except for the team and the leaders. The walls of the room felt more alive than Harry had remembered them feeling the week before. He swore a few times he saw them move.

"Normally," Horace announced firmly with a scowl on his face. "We start off team training with a big lecture and a lot of boring shite. That isn't going to happen this time. I think Ceps will learn this faster by fucking up and getting his team killed in the process. You are going to be the next leader of this team, but that doesn't mean you know how to lead."

Harry's small ray of hope that the day was going to be positive died a hasty death at Horace's words.

"I believe you can keep yourself alive when you shouldn't, but I know that you can't keep others alive while doing so," Horace stared right into Harry's eyes under the hood. "This is caused by you doing what is needed to survive. Others aren't used to that mindset, but it is how you have lived your life. Those around you, right now, have lived that kind of life. They know how to keep themselves alive. In the teams and on missions, you come first, then your team, then the mission, and lastly your target.

"For example, if your mission is to retrieve information from someone you must stay alive to have any hope of success. You must keep your team alive to accomplish your task. The mission goals are to keep your objective alive and retrieve information, but if that person threatens you or your team, then you eliminate the threat."

“You mean kill them?” Harry asked.

“In short, yes,” Horace said unflinchingly. “If the bugger fires the Killing Curse at you, you drop him instantly. No mission is worth the risk of an Operative’s life. This doesn’t change, ever. No mission supersedes the lives of your team. I will never tell you otherwise and neither will Marcus. This is where a team leader is essential. If the mission is for shite, pull out. Never force a bad situation to work for you. It will only get worse and people will die.

“Every member of this team, except for you, knows the rules. They put themselves first, and then comes the team. Know this and plan for it. If Chamel or Cal mess up, it is their own fault. It works the same for you, too. Worry about yourself first. If you die, you are no help to anybody. Do not risk letting that happen.”

Harry swallowed hard. He knew that he had put himself in danger for others in the past without regard for his own safety. *‘This is going to be a tough lesson to learn and I know that.’*

“How can I not worry about the members of my team first? I am responsible for them aren’t I?” Harry asked of Horace.

“You are responsible for yourself. They are responsible for themselves. Trust that they will stay alive. You just keep them moving towards the goal or why are you there in the first place. We do not sacrifice members so don’t worry about that. This isn’t the military where it is a numbers game. We work in small teams where every member is crucial. If you lose a member, you abort.

“Enough of the boring stuff,” Horace said with a smirk. “This week you will learn how to stay alive within a team dynamic. All of you must learn trust in the others at least as far as the missions go. Your personal life has no place here. Emotions have no place here. This is life and death at its most basic. On top of that, I will teach you to depend on your team to work together to stay alive. If you are confused now, just wait.”

Horace handed Harry two sets of portkeys. “Standard mission procedures, we use two portkeys to get somewhere and two to get back. It is hard to trace your movements if you do it that way. Now,

the goal is to get the satchel from the shed. That is all I know.” Horace looked at every member and turned to leave. He walked twenty feet or so before turning around and addressing the group again. “You will use appropriate spells on this mission. Go!”

“What does that mean?” Harry asked looking at Tonks and Cal.

Cal offered an answer. “It means that you will use the same level of spells as anyone we come across. They stun, you stun. They kill, you kill. Pretty easy to figure out really.”

Tonks held up a portkey with a number ‘1’ on it. Once all three members touched the portkey, they were taken to a drafty warehouse. The air was pungent with fish and it smelled of the sea. A watery-sounding bell could be heard in the distance. Memories of a run-down shack, a storm, and a half-giant came to Harry’s mind as Tonks held up the second portkey. With another tug, Harry landed in a dark and damp forest. He shivered as memories came to him of the last time he was in a similar place.

“Well, what now?” Harry asked.

“This is where you do the leader thing, Ceps.” Cal muttered lightheartedly.

Harry scowled under his hood. Cal couldn’t see it, but Tonks could.

“Well, we know the objective is in a shed,” Tonks spoke in hushed tones. “Might want to try the Point Me spell to find it.”

Harry inclined his head in understanding and drew his wand. He said the spell and he was pointed to the north. “Now what? I am new at this so help me out.”

“Ceps,” Tonks said. “Do what you would normally do. We are here to complete this mission but more so to learn how to work together.”

“Alright, Chamel, I will do that.” Harry calmed his mind and made his decision. “Cal, you take the rear. I will take the front. Let’s make our way north.”

Both team members nodded and followed Harry as he started walking north through the trees and underbrush. Harry used his wand to banish the brambles that kept catching on his cloak. Ten minutes into the journey, Harry heard noise ahead of them and started seeing what looked like campfire light glowing on the underside on the leaves of the tall trees.

The undergrowth became heavy and thick blocking all ways of movement except for a worn path Harry found running in the direction he needed to go. He paused and crouched behind an old moss-covered tree. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"Why are you nervous?" Tonks asked. "This is no different than your testing or any of the other messes you have gotten into. Just do what you always do."

"I was never responsible for others before," Harry complained. "This is all different."

"No it's not. Just make a plan and we will make sure it gets done."

Harry thought about the situation and decided he didn't really know what was going on beyond the thick bushes. He turned to Cal and asked him to find out if there were people near the fire and if so, how many. Cal nodded in understanding and faded into the shadows as he moved away in search of a better location to monitor who or what was in their way.

Harry turned to Tonks and searched for her eyes in the reflected fire light from the overhanging trees above. "I am not sure what you want to do now?"

"I should stay with you," Tonks answered. "Cal is used to working on his own in the shadows or hidden somewhere. I am more like you, in the middle of it all getting dirty."

"Okay, well, if we have to go in, I will take the left and you can go right, I guess."

"You have to be more forceful about your orders when you give them," Tonks instructed softly as the fire kicked up for some reason.

"You have to believe in yourself otherwise how would anyone else? This is your team and this is your mission. Think of it this way, Albus doesn't want you anywhere near this kind of thing. Are you going to let him win this? Oh, and Snape thinks you are going to fail," Tonks added as an afterthought.

"You are just trying to get me mad so I will forget everything else, aren't you?"

"If it works, then I have no problems using it to motivate you, Ceps."

Harry listened for noises coming from the area in front of him, but there was only the occasional unknown sound that he could hear. Very light footsteps advanced on their position causing Harry to turn and draw down on the intruder. A familiar grey cloak emerged from the trees with a wand pointing at the ground showing they weren't a threat. Cal lowered himself level with Harry and Tonks before giving his report quietly.

"There are three people in black cloaks in the opening ahead. There are two structures on the far side of the clearing. One is small, like a shack, and the other looks more like a cheap shelter. The three moving about seem to be on guard duty since they are retracing their steps over and over. The noise is coming from the shelter I think. I have no idea who or what is making the noise."

"Are there more ways into the camp than the entrance over there?" Harry asked pointing to the gap in the wall of vegetation.

"I didn't see one," Cal admitted. "I had to climb a tree to see what I did. It is a pretty defensible location they have. One entrance and they have some felled trees in the clearing they could use as cover should they be attacked."

"Any ideas?" Harry asked feeling overwhelmed.

"What would you normally do, Ceps?" Cal asked in return.

"Normally, I would have appeared in the middle of the camp and had to fight my way out," Harry said with an edge to his voice.

“Well, then do it that way,” Cal commented as if it was the easiest thing in the world. When he saw Harry not moving he figured that his point hadn’t been made. “Apparate into the camp and mix it up.”

“Wouldn’t that be jumping into things? I am supposed to figure this thing out aren’t I?”

“Play your strengths or you will never win,” Cal finished.

“Don’t be a tactician when you are a grunt,” Tonks added. “I agree, play your strengths.”

“Fine,” Harry decided. “I want Chamel to wait a few seconds before coming through the entrance. Cal, can you help out from your tree perch?”

“Give me five minutes and I will be ready, Chief.”

“Chief?” Harry asked.

“Nah, doesn’t fit yet. You will get there, Ceps.” Cal drifted into the darkness again.

“I really don’t want to know what that was all about,” Harry said under his breath.

The five minutes ticked by slowly as Harry became more nervous. *‘My first real mission and I could stuff it all up.’* Harry focused on Apparating into the center of the camp and willed himself to move quietly. A few seconds later, a grey robed figure silently appeared in the center of the campsite. Harry turned and saw two guards near the entrance. He couldn’t locate the third before one of the others saw him.

A spell flew past Harry’s head. The twisting green spell struck a tree instantly setting it alight and splintering it at the point of contact. Harry dropped to the ground and threw up an Absolvo and an Imprimis Shield. With his wand, Harry threw back a Reductor Curse missing his target who had ducked behind one of the tree barriers Cal had mentioned. The two foot thick tree split in half and splinters were thrown into the air.

Harry moved behind one of the few standing trees in the clearing as two more Killing Curses missed their target, him. Harry reacted by firing off two more Reductos at his attackers. One hit another barrier breaking it into a few pieces; the other hit one of the robed figures in the head.

Harry nearly dropped his wand when he saw the explosion resulting from his spell. Cloth ripped as the man's skull burst underneath its hood. Red liquid sprayed and splattered the immediate area lightly coating the ground. Parts of his head landed with a plopping-sound around his collapsing body. Harry was stunned by what he had done.

Tonks chose this moment to enter the clearing and she did so firing curse after curse at the only guard in sight. She was holding her own as the duel grew more vicious. The guard didn't have the time to concentrate enough to cast the Killing Curse at her, so he went with Cutting Curses. Tonks blocked most of them, but a few got through her shields fortunately hitting her cloak harmlessly.

Harry had watched the body of his opponent fall into a heap amongst the leaves and pine needles on the ground. He couldn't look away if he had tried. An errant spell hit his Imprimis Shield causing his attention to shift to the more important matter of Tonks and the mission. Harry rushed forward to help Tonks defeat her attacker. He joined her, side-by-side, as they fought the last guard who had retreated to another felled tree.

It was a Cruciatus Curse barely missing him that drew Harry's attention to the entrance behind them. Two more black cloaked figures had entered and they were using only Unforgivables in their assault. Harry dove away from a Killing Curse landing roughly on a bare spot of dirt. He heard something pop in his left shoulder on impact, but he ignored the pain. He regained his footing throwing a Severing Charm at the nearest attacker.

In the confusion, Tonks had taken cover behind a tree stump. She shot spell after spell trying to keep her opponents back. Harry chose to push forward and started firing curses as fast as he could. More than half were accurate enough to drive the newest people back. At

the peak of the may lay, Harry caught site of Tonks getting hit by a green jet of light in the back.

Harry stopped shooting spells completely as he watched Tonks fall to the ground limply. Harry lost track of time as he processed what had happened right in front of him. The spell was the Killing Curse. Tonks was dead and it happened on Harry's first mission.

"Fuckers!" Harry snapped. His anger at the cloaked men was nearly surpassed by his own self-loathing. He sidestepped a Cruciatus Curse and fired his own Avada Kedavra at the man who had killed Tonks. The spell struck the man in the chest dropping him instantly.

Harry turned his wand to bear on the other two and kept firing the lethal curse. The camp was ablaze as Harry struck down the other two in a few minutes. His mind, lost in sorrow and hate, dulled his senses enough that he didn't see or hear the missing person sneak up behind him.

Harry turned at the last second to see another blinding, sickly green light hit him in the head. Everything went black as the green faded away.

"Up you get, rookie!" Shouted Horace as he kicked Harry in the side.

Harry's eyes flickered open as he realized that he was laying on the ground where he had fallen from the Killing Curse. The camp surrounding him was no longer burning, but smoke still rose from the remains. Harry looked to where Tonks had fallen and found it empty. His view shifted to movement on his other side where he saw Tonks and Cal standing behind Horace waiting patiently.

"That was pathetic, Ceps," Horace yelled. "Bugged this one up good, you did. Got everyone killed on your first mission. Congratulations. Maybe our enemies could use you. I know you aren't any good right now considering you are fecking dead. Where should I start, hmm?"

The relief that Harry had felt at seeing Tonks alive was quickly wiped away as the insults and criticism bored into his mind. "How about from the beginning?"

“Watch your cheek, Ceps,” Horace snapped. “Good start, until Cal got killed trying to get back to his previous position. Two on one has that affect. You Apparating into the camp was good too, but you forgot to use your cloak’s invisibility properties. You forgot to silence your footsteps, not that that would have helped much since the noise from your spells would have let the two outside of the camp know what was going on inside.

“Chamel can hold her own, but you just had to charge to her defense. That meant that no one was watching the entrance or for the one guy you knew was around but couldn’t see. You left too much to chance and you failed. You got everyone killed here. I am out an entire team because your head was up your arse. In short, your first team mission really is a failure. Now, if you are done lying about get up and run it again.”

Horace stormed away from them and past the entrance to the camp. The camp rebuilt itself with a shimmer. Harry realized at that moment that he was in the training room. He turned to Cal and Tonks and lowered his head.

“I am sorry guys. I didn’t mean to get all of us killed.” Harry shuddered as he replayed the Killing Curses that struck him and Tonks down.

“Your first time is bound to be a disaster. Don’t worry about it,” Cal said happily.

“We are here to learn first off. Anything else is a bonus,” Tonks added softly. “Learn from your mistakes and figure out a better way to reach our goals. Let’s try again. As you can tell, the curses aren’t exactly what they appear to be. Your shoulder will need treatment at the end, but keep it moving or it will lock up on you.”

They walked out of the camp and returned to their starting point from the last time. Harry breathed out as he prepared to try again. *‘This really sucks. I do better not knowing what is going to happen.’*

Tonks laid a hand on his unhurt, right shoulder and gave it a squeeze. “It will only get harder each time. Be prepared for that.” Harry directed his team forward and they took up the same spot as before.

“Chamel, levitate me up so I can see the camp. I am going to try and Apparate in behind the shed and get the bag that way. You two will stay here and keep a look out for anyone who comes by.” Tonks sighed, but did as he asked.

The camp had changed somewhat, but the shed was still near the outside of the clearing. Harry got a clear picture of the camp and the four guards roving the compound. He signaled that he was ready and Tonks brought him back to earth. He nodded to her before activating his cloak’s invisibility and silencing his boots.

A focused, mental thrust and Harry appeared behind the shed. He peaked through a crack in the boards and saw a leather satchel sitting on a worktable. He looked around the corner of the shed and saw two guards walking away from him while the other two were checking the perimeter on the far side. Harry snuck around the side and reached the door pulling it open after silencing the hinges wandlessly. He grabbed the bag and hurried out of the shed and around the corner. He focused on his starting point and Disapparated.

He reappeared next to the bodies of his fallen teammates and four cloaked people holding their wands on him. Before he could react, green light flooded his vision for the second time that day.

Being awoken with another kick to the ribs did not make Harry very happy. He was fighting the urge to curse Horace for every second that passed as he was berated again.

“Not bad, but you left your team to be ambushed,” Horace critiqued. “Might want to include them next time. It is just a thought, but since I am the trainer here I figured I am entitled to offer advice. Try again.”

Harry tried a frontal assault on the camp, but the number of guards doubled to eight strong with six appearing from the woods. It ended in a flash of green light as well.

The fourth time, Harry tried to have everyone Apparate in and make a stand from inside the camp. Harry literally had to cut down a few of the increased guard members. Things were going well, until two men appeared behind their line of defense and Cal was struck down. Harry and Tonks were soon to follow.

On the eighth attempt, Harry had his team move around the perimeter of the camp and search out the guards in the woods. Harry had Tonks put up large, area-affecting Silencing spells since he didn't know them yet. Slowly, Harry moved his team around the camp finding a dozen guards patrolling the area in two or four person teams.

With a few scrapes, bumps, bruises, and cuts, Harry led his team to the back of the camp. The last time when they went in the front of the camp where everyone was waiting for them, it was ugly and over quick. This time, Harry intended to breach the barrier around the camp. On the fifth try, Harry learned that the wall was just that, a wall, covered by plant life. He had a knot on his head to prove that you couldn't just dive through the barrier even if you were avoiding curses.

He looked to his ragged team members and gave the signal to be ready. Harry forced out a destructive Reductor Curse and leveled a section of the wall. Cal followed that up with a strong Flame spell to burn away the undergrowth that survived the breach attempt. Harry wandlessly cast the Flame Freezing spell on himself before jumping into the flames and moving to the right of the breach. Tonks did the same, wanded, and moved to the left. Cal took cover amongst the rubble near the center of the new entrance.

Spells flew as Harry focused on his half of the camp. He had slowly come to terms with the fact that he had to count on Tonks to do her part. Helping another with their task only led you to fail on yours. Cal helped both when he could with his slow but accurate shots.

The camp had many guards firing at Harry and his team. He concentrated on what he had to at the time, systematically eliminating the defending force. He moved about the camp running from cover to cover keeping to his assigned part and fighting off the cloaked men. Now and then, a spell from Cal would drop another lessening the force Harry was faced with.

A female scream broke Harry's concentration causing him to miss his shot and earning him a broken arm. Hissing in pain, Harry finished off the last two opponents he had left. He slashed one open across the stomach and the other was launched backwards into the far wall with a loud crunch.

Harry turned to find Tonks fighting from the ground and losing the battle. Harry dropped two more as the third was taken down by Tonks. He moved to her side and saw the wound in her leg bleeding freely. "Tonks, are you alright?"

"Get the bag so we can leave," Tonks hissed through gritted teeth. "I will be fine. Now get it quick. I think I am losing a lot of blood here."

"Cal," Harry shouted. "Help her, now." Harry saw Cal rushing to the aid of his fallen teammate. His wand was already glowing as he started with quick healing spells. Harry moved to the shed and felt that something was wrong. He trained his wand and fired a Reductor Curse at the shed obliterating it and impaling a final enemy hidden inside.

Harry scanned the debris looking for any other threats before Summoning the satchel to him. He caught it with a passing thought and returned to Tonks' side. She was pale but alive and smiling.

"Good one with the shed," she spoke weakly. "It is never over until it is over, remember that." Tonks pulled out the portkeys and presented them to the team to touch.

Two tugs and they were back in a normal looking training room. Harry dropped the portkey and put his arm around Tonks cradling her to him. Cal stepped back and waited for the next step. Horace walked forward and held out his hand for the satchel. Harry pushed it to him with his foot.

"Finally," Horace began. "You beat this mission. You only died how many times? Seven wasn't it? Hopefully you learned something today, Ceps. You aren't alone and you can't do it alone. It takes a team to accomplish our goals and I think you figured that out finally. Tomorrow will be more of the same but worse. Watch the name slip up too. The wounded will still be wounded when you get done with the mission. Get Chamel to medical and you should try to learn something while you are there. Cal, help him out so he can get at least one yellow by the end of the week."

"I will, Horace," Cal responded while offering a hand to Tonks to help her up.

Harry stood and lifted Tonks up while she pulled on Cal. Once she was upright, Harry scooped her into his arms and made for the door at a fast pace leaving Cal to jog to keep up. "Good show, Ceps. I am pleasantly surprised by how well you learned on that one. Most people give up after five tries. You were still giving it your all on number eight."

"We died seven times before we got to number eight," Harry said without much thought on the matter since his attention was elsewhere. "We don't get that many tries in real life so what good was it?"

"That is why we train," Cal said. "Best to fail in training and succeed in real life. That is why we do it. It is only the first day so don't worry too much."

Harry didn't respond as he hurried down the hall to the medical wing. The door opened as Harry neared it. Tonks had drifted off in his arms and was huddled against his chest. He started to worry when she didn't stir as he gently laid her on the nearest bed.

"I need a healer out here, now!" Harry tried to keep his voice steady but he failed miserably. A healer hurried out, brushing past Harry, and began scanning Tonks with his wand. He mumbled a few unheard words and Summoned a bottle of Blood-Replenisher from the cabinet across the room. He handed the bottle to Harry and told him to make her drink the whole thing. The healer began casting a few spells on Tonks trying to bring her around and testing her reflexes.

Harry focused on Tonks pale face as he uncorked the bottle. He tipped her head up and put the bottle to her lips trying to get her to take a drink. Her eyes fluttered open for a second as they focused on Harry. Tonks moved her hand to his face and lightly brushed his lips and cheek before drifting off again.

Harry moved behind her and held her to his chest adjusting her head to a better position. He started whispering to her trying to get her to wake up. When her eyes fluttered open again, Harry told her to drink. She smiled weakly but drank a little of the potion. She stopped drinking once the taste really hit her so Harry had to urge her to drink more forcefully.

He managed to overcome her resistance by almost forcing the potion down her throat. After she gagged a little the healer told Harry she had ingested enough. Her cloak had been moved up to expose the wound in her leg revealing a deep gash in the thigh. The healer and Cal worked together to heal the open wound and more potions were Summoned to apply to the injury.

Once he was done, the healer healed Harry's shoulder and arm then started on his minor cuts, but Cal waved him off saying that Harry needed to learn basic medicine.

An hour later, Cal gave up for the day. Harry could barely keep from causing the wounds from opening up again. Cal congratulated Harry on a successful day and left the room. Harry held Tonks until she regained consciousness and was released by the healers.

Harry helped hold Tonks up as they walked back to the team room where they portkeyed to the back yard of Number Four. Harry assisted Tonks in the back door and through the empty kitchen. It was in the hallway that they ran into a Dursley.

"What happened?" Petunia asked trying not to appear too interested in the answer.

"Training accident," Harry replied dismissively. He nearly carried an exhausted Tonks up the stairs while ignoring the cross look Petunia wore. He lightly laid the metamorph on his bed drawing the sheets back. He pulled off her cloak and began undressing her carefully. He didn't remove all of her clothes but enough so she would be comfortable as she slept.

Harry left the room and retrieved some food from the kitchen. On the return to his room, Vernon stopped him as he passed the living room.

"Boy," Vernon yelled. "What is this I hear your trollup got hurt?"

Harry stopped instantly feeling the frustration from the day return. He set the food on the floor before turning towards his uncle. "Didn't learn from yesterday, did you?" Harry said menacingly. His wand slid into his hand and he advanced into the living room. "I warned you last

time and you didn't believe me. Do you want me to hurt you? You will treat Tonks with respect. That is all there is to it."

Vernon seemed to rethink his words when the telly flickered a few times and turned off. "Harry, please don't," Petunia said pleading for her husband.

Harry didn't look away from Vernon as he fired four Stinging Hexes in a row at his uncle. The shock of the attack did more damage to the man than the actual spell itself. "The next time, I won't use such a weak spell. I promise you I know much worse ones."

Harry returned to the food, picked it up and left his uncle rubbing his chest where the spells had hit him. Petunia let out a breath as she settled into her seat on the couch.

Harry opened the door and saw Tonks sitting up in bed staring at him. "Not much of a guard I am today," she said lightheartedly. "I couldn't fight off a firsty right now let alone a Death Eater."

"That is why I am here, Nymph. I brought you some food since we never really ate much during lunch." Tonks started getting up but Harry stopped her. "I will feed you where you are. Just settle back and we will see if I know how to do this."

Over the next half hour, Harry fed Tonks some food as he ate along with her. All too soon, Tonks started drifting off again. Harry put the plate on his desk and joined her in bed. Once he was settled, Tonks rolled over and placed herself on top of him falling asleep instantly. Harry smiled as he brushed the hair out of her face. He kissed her lightly and held her tight as he too fell asleep.

The next day was more of the same punishment at Horace's whim. Harry failed to accomplish his task that day. It had more to do with leadership skills and less to do with teamwork. Harry started getting discouraged after lunch, but he never gave up. The mission was lost a dozen times over the course of the day.

Tonks and Cal spent another hour with Harry trying to improve his healing skills, but it yielded the same results. Harry was not destined to be a healer in any way, shape, or form. Their teamwork had

improved more though. They were beginning to know what roles each member tended to lean towards and how they carried out that role.

They came home later in the night and didn't run into any of the Dursleys. The house was quiet when they came in and it stayed that way all night.

Wednesday dawned brightly and was a welcomed change from the past few rainy days. Harry stirred and hugged Tonks gratefully to his chest ignoring the aches in his body as he moved.

"Miss me or something?" Tonks asked in a teasing fashion while looking into Harry's eyes.

"I guess so, Nymph. I just wanted to hug you this morning. So, what is the plan for today then?"

"More leadership training I would imagine. You haven't wowed Horace in that area yet."

"Understatement if there ever was one. I haven't wowed him in any area yet."

"That isn't true, Harry, and you know it. You are doing really well. Horace just wants you to do your best that is all. He has high hopes for you as do I, but mine are more for fun than work."

"Naughty girl," Harry said tickling the cheeky auror. They rolled around the bed a little until a tapping at the window caught Harry's attention. He looked to the window to find an owl standing on the sill waiting to be let in. Tonks let Harry go to the window but only after getting in a quick grab in as he slipped out of the bed.

Harry opened the window and the owl fluttered to the back of the desk chair. Harry noticed the note on the owl's leg and removed it quickly as the owl watched him closely. Once freed of its burden, the owl took flight out of the still open window and pulled up and out of sight.

Harry studied the outside of the letter and broke the Gringotts seal. He read the words and smiled slightly earning an eyebrow raise from

Tonks. "Ragnok has the information I asked about concerning Fudge. He thinks I should stop by and hear what it is. Do you think we can stop by the bank today after training?"

"If you manage to beat yesterday's task, I think Horace might let us leave early," Tonks said.

"What am I doing wrong on that? I just can't seem to make the right decision. How can we get the guy out without his friends killing us when we leave?"

"Harry, think about how it plays out each time. We can get to the guy, but he resists us when we try to leave. That is when everyone tries to kill us. How can we prevent that?"

"Stunning him doesn't work, though. We tried that and the alarms went off when we did. Fighting our way out didn't work since there are too many of them. What else is there?"

"Well, Harry, have you thought about portkeying him out? Do you think that would work? The key to this part is to keep your mind open to as many options as possible. Horace knows you can pretty much fight your way in and out of situations. He is trying to get you to be sneaky. He wants an able leader not a hired wand."

"I just want to get through the mission and keep everyone alive."

"That is the first step, Harry. You know the first goal. Now you just have to find a way to get there from here. You have a list of things you are working on, right? Well, how many of those things play into these kinds of situations? I would say most of them in most ways. Winning takes information, control, will power, and intent to get there. Maybe you have been over thinking the scenario. In every situation there is a balance to thought, planning, and action. I have said it before and I will say it again, play your strengths."

"My strengths seem to be action and none of the rest. That didn't work before so why would it now?"

"Because, Harry, you are getting used to trusting us and relying on us to get the job done. Every step is designed to build on the previous

one to achieve a functioning team. Cal and I can help you lead, but you must make the decisions or we will fail. That is how these tests are designed. The minute we take charge, we can't win."

Tonks watched Harry go from puzzled and confused to angry and determined. "See how sadistic Horace can be, Harry? But don't get me wrong, it is necessary or things won't work when it is for real. They are forcing you to become the leader you have to be. Cal and I do not have the skills to be leaders. We can accomplish a mission for sure, but a real challenge would break us. You are made of stronger stuff. They know that and see in you what we need."

"And what do they see in me?"

"Someone who can survive when they shouldn't. Someone who can fight against the odds and win. Someone who won't break when everyone else will. Anyone else would have given up yesterday after the sixth try. You kept at it on number twelve."

"Maybe I am just too stupid not to know when to give up?"

"No, Harry, you are smart enough to know that giving up isn't an option. You have had one obstacle after another in your life. This is just more of the same."

"Lucky me." Harry looked at the letter again in his hands. "Fudge is another obstacle and I want to overcome him. He worked against us all year and I think he will do it again. I want him out of office, but should I want that?"

"Honestly, you can want what ever you want. The trick is getting what you want. The sooner we get to work the sooner we can get to Gringotts. Let's go."

Tonks got out of bed and kissed Harry deeply before moving off to her clothes bag.

Harry spent the day getting beaten up time and time again. He won the mission from the day before on his first try by following Tonks' advice, but the next two missions brought him back to constant defeat.

During the lunch break, Tonks sat Harry down and told him to forget everything that was going on around him and just wing it.

The suggestion enabled Harry to win the mission he had been stuck on. He was slowly learning how to balance his innate ability and instinct with what he was being taught. By the end of the day, Harry thought he had figured out the right way to manage the tasks being set.

"I think you are getting it, Ceps," Tonks said.

"I think I am learning the balance of drive, focus, and patience, Chamel. It has been hard to do, but I think I am getting there, albeit slowly."

"Slowly is fine, Ceps. In the end, you will get there. If you haven't noticed, the number of people we have been up against has been increasing every time. As badly as you think we have been doing, we are at a level far above a normal mission. Your only reference point is what you have done before. Feel confident in what you are doing."

"So, since we are free, can we meet Ragnok then?"

"I see no reason why not. We can change and Apparate to Diagon Alley from here."

Harry removed his cloak and stored it in his shrunken trunk. He waited until Tonks had done the same, nearly falling over in the process, before they Apparated into Diagon Alley. They had started on their way to the bank when a small group of kids no older than eight, at the most, caught sight of Harry.

Tonks saw the group fall in behind them and follow them down the street causing more people to pay attention to Harry. Soon, the whole of Diagon Alley was watching Harry Potter walk down the street. Tonks waited for something to happen, but nothing did aside from a few people smiling or waving. Harry kept his head down as he walked so he didn't see them.

When they neared the bank, the group had increased in size to a point that forced Harry to take notice of them. He paused and turned

to look at the crowd as one. The younger ones waved happily as did many of the women in the group. The elders and a few of the middle aged people eyed him carefully. Harry waved uneasily at the younger kids and nodded at the older spectators.

“Heard you are a fan of the Minister?” Asked a wary looking wizard in a mud colored cloak.

Harry hesitated before answering slowly. “The Minister says a lot of things. So far, I haven’t really heard much truth come out of his mouth.”

“That mean you aren’t with the Ministry?” Asked another member of the crowd.

“Let’s just say that I am not with Fudge’s Ministry and leave it at that.” Harry nodded with emphasis as he spoke. He made eye contact with many of the nearly twenty people in the alley. Harry turned and continued on to the bank with Tonks trailing behind watching for an attack.

They entered the bank and Harry walked straight to the head teller station. The goblin at the desk signaled another goblin near the rear of the bank and he disappeared through a gilded door. Harry was noticed by patrons in the bank and a couple of them watched Harry very closely.

The goblin at the station smiled and bowed his head slightly to Harry as he approached. “Mr. Potter, Director Ragnok will be with you shortly.”

“Thank you, Garlsnin,” Harry read from the placard in front of the goblin earning him an even bigger smile. Harry forced himself not to shiver as the pointed, nasty teeth were exposed even more than before.

When Ragnok arrived, those who had been watching Harry were shocked to see the head goblin shake Harry’s hand and call him by name. Moreover, they were surprised when Harry did the same in return and followed the goblin into the office area of the bank.

When Harry, Tonks, and Ragnok arrived in Ragnok's office, Harry voiced his reason for being there. "As I said in my letter, I want Fudge out of office. Can you help me?"

"Harry," began the elder goblin, "are you sure you wish to challenge the sitting minister? He could make things quite difficult for you before he is removed."

"He couldn't make it any harder than it is right now, Ragnok. We need a different person in there now. Can you help me?"

"I can, and I will, Harry," Ragnok stated firmly. "I have a detailed list of the transgressions by Fudge against us. Now, the majority of the Wizarding world won't be concerned about that, so we need to give them reasons that would directly affect them."

"What would that be?"

"Simple, Harry, money." Ragnok leaned back in his chair and waited for the right moment to continue. "Fudge has been trying to arrest control of the Wizarding world's money since before he came into power. He doesn't like the idea that non-humans are in control of the money."

"Why not? If you haven't cheated anyone nor stolen the money, why not leave you in control?"

"Simplistic view, Harry, I like that. If only more people were to look at it like that. We do not cheat anyone. We play strictly by the rules in our business dealings. Some may think they were cheated, but they were not. Any illegal activity by goblins is handled swiftly by us. I know how the world works and if we give the Ministry any opportunity to sanction us, they will do it. Our history is checkered at best and only in the last hundred years or so have we been given the ability to manage ourselves and additionally the Wizard monetary system."

"Director Ragnok," Tonks queried, "What has Fudge done recently?"

"In answer Ms. Tonks, the Minister has been working to regulate our movements and actions in reference to the bank. He wants the Ministry notified of every business dealing and transaction. If you

weren't aware, our charter allows us autonomy from the Ministry in almost everything. The Minister has been trying to change that since he came into office."

"No offense meant, Director, but why hasn't he been successful? Fudge is pretty good at getting what he wants politically."

"None taken as that is a fair and accurate question, Ms. Tonks. The answer is certain well placed groups have worked against him. They want their dealings private and unmonitored. The truly odd thing about that is the same groups wish non-humans removed from the magical community. I find it amazing that people would fight against us and at the same time try to keep us around. If the Ministry were successful in assuming control of the money, their activities would be exposed as would their supporters."

"Are we talking about Voldemort?" Harry asked.

"I can not confirm nor deny who we are talking about, Harry. I 'will' say that your instincts seem quite sharp today. Now on to the business at hand. The Minister has been putting provisions in place over the years that appear to me as precursors to a larger legal position. He has made it difficult for werewolves to find employment. He has sponsored the segregation and isolation of giants. Some inhabitants of the Dark Forest are there because there is nowhere else for them to go."

"I am not sure I am following." Harry wore a puzzled look as Ragnok continued.

"If one were to make small steps in the direction they wish to reach, it would seem as a normal. If one were to make a giant leap in that direction, people might fight it as being too aggressive or oppressive from them to swallow."

"So, he slowly made laws limiting the rights of people he doesn't like?" Harry asked trying to figure it out.

"Werewolves were feared only during the full moon cycle once a month," Ragnok explained. "Now, werewolves are feared much of the time. Giants are looked down upon as barely sentient. We are viewed

as evil creatures that hide in the dark and hoard money. All leaders of government prey on people's fears to achieve their goals. Some use it to better society; others use it to better their own situation. Voldemort used fear to gain power and control. He started off preying on creatures, then moved to muggles, and then on to half-bloods and even a few purebloods."

"My father and the Longbottoms."

"When you are one of the protected groups, you are more likely to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others. Purebloods have always been the protected group. Only at the end of his first bid for power did Voldemort attack Purebloods. Some of them took notice of the changing winds and began to distance themselves from his cause."

Harry looked to Tonks who had been quiet for most of the session. "The problem with hate, Harry, is that it can be shifted to others so easily. You can hate one person or a group of people and then find others that could fall into that category and start hating them too. It can grow."

"It seems hard to understand how that could work though," Harry said.

"You are seeing it from the end and not the beginning," Tonks answered. "Things are much less defined at the beginning than in the middle or the end. Things that seemed right can become very wrong."

"My trip to the Ministry last month. It seemed right at the time, but it didn't turn out that way."

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions, Harry," Ragnok stated earning a look of surprise from Harry. "We goblins do read more than the markets young man. A good man learns from his mistakes to avoid them in the future. A failure and fool repeats them over and over again expecting a different outcome. I believe you are here to discuss a certain person and their actions concerning the magical world so we should get back on topic."

Ragnok slid a thick folder in Harry's direction. "I have documented every suggestion, request, demand, and threat made by Cornelius Fudge to us. His latest ones have been quite forceful and specific in

direction. If we refuse to comply with the Minister, he says he will enact a goblin registration order not unlike the one he and his administration plans to enact on the werewolves in the coming months. War has a funny affect on normal people. They seem to forget common sense at crucial times.”

“What would happen if this was made public?” Harry asked.

“As it is, nothing much,” Ragnok stated simply. “In proper context or with the right people behind it, something may happen. The key is to show the common person how this could affect them. I know you have your own evidence of wrongdoings concerning the Minister so I just wanted to share with you what we have.”

“Again, with all do respect, Director,” Tonks prefaced, “what do you expect to get out of this? People in your position do not reveal your cards unless there is an agenda in place.”

Ragnok looked from Tonks to Harry and hesitated before answering. “I ask for nothing specific in return for this information. Over the years I believe I have learned how to read people and I am willing to take a calculated risk in this situation. At worst, the current timeline will continue unchanged and the Ministry will attempt to take over Gringotts within a decade as we have estimated considering historical precedent. As I said at the will reading, I see the future of the Wizarding world before me. If I am wrong, then we will do what we have done in the past. We will fight for what we have to.”

“You are gambling quite a lot on this,” Tonks said plainly earning a raised eyebrow from Ragnok. “I never knew goblins were much into gambling.”

“Gambling to you, but a worthy business risk to us considering the alternative. We have little to lose if you think about it enough. I know what will happen if things remain unchanged.”

“You are starting to sound like a centaur, Ragnok,” Harry said with a smirk not completely following what was being said.

"If the center casts enough to the fringes of society, the fringe becomes the new center," Ragnok said cryptically. "I speak with many groups in my capacity as Director of Gringotts."

"You would do well in the Ministry if you wished to," Tonks said.

"My place is here, Ms. Tonks."

"Now that I am lost, I was wondering, since I am here, if I can visit my family chamber?" Harry asked while nervously lining up the papers in the folder he had been given moments before.

"It would be my pleasure, Harry," Ragnok seemed to lose a good many years as he responded. The old goblin seemed much younger as he slid out of his chair and waved Harry and Tonks to the door. "It is a rare event the changing over of a family chamber. Normally, it is done by the family, but in your case that never occurred. Please, let us make our way to the proper cart system."

Harry followed Ragnok down the hall and back towards the front of the building but they turned out of the main hallway early. They came to a set of granite doors reinforced with wrought iron. Ragnok spoke a series of words and the doors opened revealing another smaller room with four very large goblins standing at attention. They wore weapons that Harry was sure had come right out of one of Binns' lectures.

The guards eyed the intruders warily as they entered the room. "Harry, which goblin would you like to assign to your chamber?" Seeing Harry about to speak, Ragnok interjected first. "I am not available as a personal assistant."

"Well, then, Griphook would be my choice," Harry replied.

"Excellent." Ragnok turned to one of the guards and spoke quickly in Gobbledegook. The guard scrutinized Ragnok for a few seconds before lumbering out of the room and towards the main hallway. "It will only be a few moments and we can go to your family chamber."

Harry fought off the images of a basilisk, Ginny, and the diary as they waited. Griphook appeared looking worried until Ragnok addressed him.

“Griphook, are you willing to assume the position of guardian entrusted to the Potter Family Chamber and all associated assets within the purview of Gringotts Bank?”

“Yes, Director, I am,” Griphook stood straighter than Harry had ever seen a goblin stand before. “I am honoured, Director.”

“It was not me, Griphook,” Ragnok said. “It was Mr. Potter who requested you.”

“I thank you for choosing me, Mr. Potter,” Griphook bowed low.

“It is Harry and you are welcome, but no more bowing if you would please.”

“As you request, Harry,” Griphook stood to the side of the doorway beyond three of the guards.

“To access your chamber, Harry,” Ragnok began, “you must enter the tunnel system through these doors. You must have Griphook or me with you at all times from this point to your chamber door. If you are found alone, well let’s just say that bad things have been known to happen. Now, I must lead you this time, but from here on Griphook will assist you.”

Ragnok approached the door and the guards moved to the sides. The door opened upon command and Harry followed the goblin into another even smaller room where a row of carts waited to be used. The carts were of a sturdier build and more luxurious in furnishings. Leather and felt comprised the seating and flooring of the polished redwood cart.

Ragnok and Griphook entered the cart taking the seats on the far side while Harry helped Tonks into the remaining rear seat taking the front seat for himself. Once they were situated, the cart launched into motion at nearly Firebolt speeds. The first course change was a ninety degree drop that had Tonks howling with excitement. The drop continued for nearly a minute before a series of level turns started the confusion of a normal cart ride.

"I have always loved that part," Ragnok said looking to Harry. "I understand that you are used to wild rides since you are quite the Quidditch player. Any plans for going professional?"

"Me?" Harry blurted out. "I do alright, but I don't think I am good enough."

"I dare say it is a good thing that you are not the scout then," Ragnok commented as a wicked turn put the cart on two wheels. "If you were, there would be far less teams and only a handful of players. I have it on good authority that you would do well in the Quidditch league. Keep an open mind and a determined spirit about the sport, Harry."

Harry smiled and agreed not giving it much thought. The cart sped into a large room in the depths of Gringotts. Harry thought it was just for show until he saw the dragons. Fabled and rumored, dragons did indeed guard vaults in Gringotts. *'Bloody hell, they use dragons.'* Harry looked into the eyes, three sets, of Common Welsh Greens.

As Harry looked, so did the dragons. Their stare never wavered from the cart as it slowed passing the dragons. "Um, we aren't stopping here are we?" Harry asked nervously.

"No, Harry, we are just slowing so the dragons have a chance to see us and kill us if we don't belong. We belong, so we will be fine." Ragnok remained in his seat as the dragons moved about but never took their eyes away from the cart.

"Good to know," Harry said but he kept his hand on his wand. He didn't know what spell he would use, but he could try a few before he was burnt to a crisp. The cart made it through the room and sped up again descending further.

Harry looked back to see Tonks smiling quite a large smile. She reached up and rubbed Harry's shoulders as the cart took another wicked turn and started down a long corridor of unique vault doors. Some were black granite, some white marble, others steel or iron. Harry caught a few numbers as the doors flashed by; 98, 67, 52, 41, 28, 14.

The track left that room with vault number 11 being the last listed. The cart dropped again and entered another dimly lit chamber. The cart slowed to nearly a crawl compared to before. The vault doors looked even more stately and refined. Harry saw 10, 9, and 8 drift past. Each vault had its own recess in the stone wall carving a niche for it. There were only doors on one side of the track and the next vault came into view.

Harry caught sight of the blackest door he could imagine. It had red accents and stone edges. The door looked to be impenetrable, but what nearly knocked Harry out of the cart was the creature sitting before the door. A large, proud griffin sat in front of the door. It watched the newcomers intently as the cart stopped.

Harry could only think that while a dragon stare may have been more threatening, the griffin's was much more intense and penetrating. Harry had a firm grip on his wand and was waiting for the first sign of attack. Ragnok and Griphook exited the cart and Tonks followed leaving Harry in the rear of the group. The walk to the chamber door and ultimately the griffin was too short for Harry. Ragnok turned and spoke to Harry.

"Harry, this is the Potter Family Chamber, number 7. This is Vincent, as I am told, the griffin who guards your Family Chamber per our long standing arrangement with the Potters. Upkeep costs are barely noticeable with your current holdings. So I advise that you maintain Vincent as your living security measure."

"Um, sure, why not," Harry was getting more unnerved as Vincent never looked away from him.

"I must make this official and all," Ragnok spoke clearing his throat. "Mister Harry James Potter, son of James Potter, I do hereby confer official ownership of the Potter Family Chamber, number 7, to you henceforth with all powers, rights, and privileges. Please advance to the vault door and place your left hand and wand on the door."

Harry looked to Ragnok then back to Vincent. Harry took a deep breath and walked forward. Vincent stepped to the side, but his claws were fully extended and poised to attack. Harry watched the animal closely as he reached the door. Doing as instructed, Harry placed his

left hand flat on the door. He drew his wand and placed it, too, on the door.

A few seconds later, the door glowed with a silvery shimmer. Harry looked at the door and saw it fade from sight to reveal the contents of the vault inside. A shriek drew Harry back to reality causing him to turn and see the griffin right next to him. Expecting a quick death, Harry looked right into the eyes of the griffin as it stopped its advance.

Vincent looked Harry up and down slowly before closing its eyes and rubbing its head against Harry's chest. Harry did what he usually did when an animal rubbed against him; he rubbed its head and scratched behind its ears. The griffin sniffed Harry and continued letting Harry pet him. Thoughts of Hagrid cooing about such a good griffin and wonderful animal floated through his mind.

Harry looked to Tonks and Ragnok to find Ragnok in deep thought and Tonks lowering her wand to her side. "I believe it was your mother who selected Vincent when your last griffin was retired. With how fast you were accepted, I believe this is not the first time you have met this griffin."

"Hello, Vincent," Harry spoke softly to the griffin as he continued petting the creature. "I am glad you didn't kill me today. That would have made it difficult for Tonks to explain where I am next time there is an Order meeting."

"Harry," Ragnok continued, "you must key in the proper people to the chamber before they access it. Security in this area is the highest of the bank and even the world. You and I are the only people keyed to the door. I am merely by title, so you are the only one who can permit or prohibit access. If you would like Griphook to carry out business in your stead, you might want to add him to the vault access list. The chamber is made up of different rooms and access can be limited by room. Your hand and stating the persons name and access level along with their hand print will key them in."

"How many rooms are there in the chamber?" Harry asked still petting Vincent.

“Yours has four rooms within the chamber,” Ragnok explained. “Access is incremental since all the rooms are connected one by one. To get to the third room you must go through the first two rooms.”

Harry keyed Griphook into the first room and Tonks into the third. For some reason, Harry wanted to keep the fourth room to himself until he knew what was in every room. Vincent took up a position right outside of the chamber and kept a watch out for others as Harry and Tonks entered the chamber together hand in hand.

The first room contained more gold than Harry could believe existed. The room was quite large and the gold was neatly stacked in rows and set into trays which were stacked from floor to ceiling. The stacks filled the room to where only a narrow path was open for a person to walk to the next room. The defined barrier in the wall shimmered and vanished as Harry approached it.

The second room had more gold in it, but only a few stacks reached the ceiling and the remaining few stacks were only a few feet high. Harry found much of the remaining room filled with books. Shelves and shelves of books lined the walls and again a small walkway was left open.

Tonks looked at a few titles and made odd noises. “What is it, Nymph?”

“This book doesn’t exist,” Tonks said pointing to an old looking book with barely legible writing. “It was lost when the Library of Alexandria was destroyed. We learn about some of the lost works in auror training. One of the instructors is obsessed with the Library so that is how I know. How in the world did your family get this book? You can tell it is not a normal book because the binding looks like it was done by hand hundreds of years ago.”

Harry just nodded and thought of losing Hermione in the vault for a few years or more. “So, it would be smart to keep Hermione away from here or she and Vincent would have to be good friends for it to work out?”

Ignoring his question, Tonks continued searching the shelves. “There is only two other copies of this book and our Ministry and the

Russians have them. This book over here is illegal in every country that is part of the International Confederation.”

“Who ever knew you were the bookworm type?”

“I am not a bookworm. I just know what books are and how they can be used.” Tonks gave him a cheeky smile.

“Maybe so, but as Horace said I don’t learn well from books. This is Hermione’s thing not mine.”

The next room was filled with paintings, armor, furniture, jewels, and other heirloom type of things. Tonks was looking at clothes that seemed a few hundred years out of date. “If you want clothes, Madam Malkins is nearby.”

“These are clothes from the 1600’s, Harry. This is the real thing. Some of these have to be wedding dresses, too.”

“I will leave you here so I can check out the fourth room then.” Harry walked between the rows of clothes and found the last door. It shimmered again and faded from view. Harry entered what appeared to be an office. A bookshelf was against the near wall and cabinets lined the remainder of the small room except for an open space where a small tapestry hung. It was old looking and the words weren’t legible from Harry’s position. On the desk were a quill set, ink bottle, two envelopes, and a muggle pen set.

Harry looked at the pen set and saw engraving etched into it.

Congratulations, Lily.

Happy Graduation.

Love, Mum and Dad

Harry fought the tears that started welling up in his eyes. He lost the battle as he thought of his mum and the grandparents he never knew. *‘My mum’s pen set from graduating Hogwarts. I will never get this from my parents. I will never hear those words. I know who made that happen and I will never forget.’*

The quill set was his father's, also given upon graduation from Hogwarts by parents. The tears continued as Harry picked up the quill and petted the feather gently. He sighed deeply as he realized the truth yet again that all the hoping in the world, all the magic in the universe, wouldn't bring them back. *'Move forward, Potter. Stop living in the past.'*

Harry intended to do just that, until he looked more closely at the two envelopes sitting on the corner of the desk. Both read, "Harry", but one was written in feminine script and the other was in profoundly male writing not unlike his own.

"Fuck me," Harry couldn't stop himself from saying as he froze in place. The gravity of the situation nearly pulled him to the floor as the world seemed to fall down around him. *'They left me letters. They each left me a letter. How could you write a letter to your kid when he is a baby and you think you might be killed? How could you do that?'*

With a shaking hand, nearly a blur from nerves, Harry reached out and picked up his mother's letter. Pulling it to his chest, Harry hugged it tightly hearing the paper crinkle under the desire for a real hug from his mother. The tears flowed freely as Harry tried to remember just one of his mother's hugs, a kiss on the cheek, or a pat on the head. Anything at all would have caused Harry more happiness than his entire life added up.

He remembered nothing.

With a fevered shake, Harry opened the letter and looked upon the words before him. He read every word, every sentence, and every paragraph. He read it twice, even three times. At the end, Harry could think only one thought, *'She loved me. She really loved me. She didn't hesitate to sacrifice herself for me because she loved me more than her own life. What greater example of love is there? I miss you, mum.'*

Harry broke down as he held the letter to his chest again. He did not remember the love his mother had for him, but Harry felt that love coursing through his veins. It was just like his magic when Horace worked him up into a frenzy. It was alive and it had a purpose for its existence.

'The next time I meet those fuckers, I will hurt them. I will hurt them like they hurt me.'

As he composed himself again, Harry carefully returned the letter to its envelope. He flattened it gently and set it on the desk. Shifting his gaze, Harry picked up his father's letter. Once removed and laid out, Harry started reading the words his father had written him. Much of the letter gave Harry advice on how to cause trouble and get away with it, girls and the best ways to become friendly with them, and above all hiding those things from his mum.

Harry couldn't help but laugh against his tears as his father rambled on about giving Sirius hell for him. The letter ended with James admitting his love for Harry and a request to take care of Lily.

'I am sorry that I couldn't do it, dad. I think I am done feeling guilty for all the things I couldn't stop and even some of the things I let happen. I love you, dad.'

An additional sheet had a few things written on it that Harry had to think about. In short, it looked like Harry's life was about to get a bit easier and less stressful if what was written was true. Following the same procedure he did with his mum's letter, Harry returned his father's to its envelope. He picked up both letters and put them in his trunk storing them in a safe place.

Harry looked around the room once and decided that he needed to finish his business for the day. He left the room and saw Tonks sitting on a crate of stuff near the door. She looked up and smiled widely but soon grew concerned as she noticed the tear stains.

"Harry, are you alright?" Tonks asked as she moved to hug Harry tightly.

Harry stopped himself from giving his normal answer to questions like that. He hugged her back and let his heart open up to the action. His eyes were closed tightly so he didn't notice the faint light he gave off as he hugged Tonks.

She felt a change in his mood and his actions. He wasn't the same Harry that had gone into the room an hour ago. He was different but

the same. She wasn't sure what it was, but she felt something different in herself at that moment.

"Harry, are you alright?" Tonks pulled back and looked into his eyes. She barely managed to stop her gasp as she saw no trace of the boy left in those eyes. She saw only Harry Potter the man looking back.

"I am doing better, Nymphadora," Harry almost purred. "And every day I will be doing better. I think I have it figured out, Nymph. I think I have it all figured out."

"What figured out?"

"My life. I have my life figured out. I have always had an idea, but now I think I just accepted it."

"I don't think I am following you completely, Harry."

"Have you ever been confused or lost or felt not right? Then suddenly everything makes sense, you find your way, or you feel perfect. I am at that point right now. It makes sense, I know my way, and I doubt I could feel more right."

"You are the same Harry that went in there an hour ago, right?"

"Probably not, but this is who that person is now. I hope you don't mind."

Tonks looked into Harry's eyes again and found a level of peace that hadn't been there before. The unfocused energy, frustration, anger, and angst that Harry had come to embody had been replaced by peace, focus, and determination that she had only seen when he was fighting for his life. "As long as you don't snap, I think I can get used to you this way."

"Good to hear, Nymph." Harry kept eye contact as he leaned forward and kissed Tonks passionately on the lips. His hands moved to the back of her head and the small of her back as he continued kissing her. She returned the favour by rubbing the back of his head and grabbing his bum firmly. Harry broke the kiss breathing deeply and looking determined about something.

“Knut for your thoughts, Harry?”

“You have a knut on you?”

“I think there are a few hundred a few rooms back so I can get you one if you need it.”

“I like you, Tonks. I like you a lot and I want to keep going with us.”

“I am glad to hear that, Harry. I like you a lot as well, but what is going to be different about us?”

“I understand my life and what I need to do. In addition, I know what I want and I am willing to reach for it.”

“Alright, I can live with that. You must have found something pretty good in there.”

“I found something I never realized I had. Moreover, I learned about myself and my parents. Some important questions have been answered that I never knew I worried about. As I said before, I will be better with every day.”

“I am excited for you.” Tonks nibbled on her lip as she waited for Harry to respond.

Harry kissed her again causing her knees to buckle and give out. Harry held her up and continued until the lack of oxygen forced a break.

“I don’t think we will need to worry about the Dursleys much longer.”

“Really and why is that, Harry?”

“You will find out later, Nymph.”

Tonks pouted. “I don’t like surprises, Harry.”

“I thought you did?”

“I do when I am the one doing them or I already know what they are or at least I have a good idea.”

“Well, you can hate me then cause I am not going to tell. Now, I have one more stop to make and if you have any then we have those too.”

“I think I am good, Harry. Let’s do your stop and then get home. We are going to be really late as it is.”

“Don’t worry about it. Blame me for all of it and the rest will take care of itself.”

“The new and confident Harry Potter, I like it.”

“I am not through yet. Let’s go. I hope Vincent hasn’t eaten Griphook while we were in here. I kind of like that goblin.”

They left the chamber to find Griphook and Ragnok playing a goblin game involving tiles and quite a bit of money. Vincent was merely watching the two. Harry walked up to Vincent and patted his head. The griffin sniffed him again before allowing Harry to proceed. The two goblins gathered up their game and winnings and piled into the cart with Harry and Tonks following.

“Did you find everything you needed, Harry?” Ragnok asked.

“More than I could have hoped for, Ragnok.” Harry was much more up beat and his forcefulness was more assured. “I guess you do gamble.”

“I was feeling particularly lucky today.” Ragnok looked Harry up and down. “I think my luck is going to be better than average for the foreseeable future as well.”

“Maybe, Ragnok, maybe.” Harry smiled coyly. “It might be a little bumpy at the beginning, but I think everything will work out in the end.”

“I completely believe you, Harry. I am glad that you found what you were looking for.”

“I found something I didn’t know I was looking for.” Harry remained silent for the remainder of the trip focusing on his next task.

Tonks watched Harry as well as she could and found his attitude to be remarkably better than the depressed and agitated mood he seemed to carry with him everywhere he went. She rubbed the back of his neck as they ascended. Harry held her hand in his as they reached the surface.

"If you need anything, Harry," Ragnok said. "Notify me at once. I will always be available for you."

"Thank you, Ragnok," Harry replied. "I appreciate it."

"Harry," Griphook said haltingly. "I am here for anything you need as well. My primary duty is to you and your estate."

"Thank you as well, Griphook." Harry nodded and shook the goblin's hand before leading Tonks to the lobby.

When they arrived in the lobby, the guards watched them intently as they walked to the door. There were only a few customers in the bank at the late hour, but they followed every one of Harry's movements. One of the customers had been a classmate of James Potter and he had to do a double take to be sure that he hadn't seen a ghost. The eyes and scar proved that it was Harry and not James that walked passed the man but the way he moved was an exact match for his father.

Harry walked out of the bank and down the alley. Tonks was surprised by how un-phased Harry was by all the attention he was getting. The way he was walking, the very air about him, demanded attention be given. When he passed Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, Fred and George had been closing up for the night. They were about to call out but stopped for some reason. They too watched Harry walk down the alley.

Turning into a doorway that was mostly hidden from view, Harry opened the door and started up the stairs to the second floor offices of *The Quibbler*. Tonks followed Harry as closely as she could up the stairs and into the waiting area of the paper which also happened to be the writing area, editing area, and printing area. The offices were a collection of pictures, clippings, and quills.

There were only four people in the office that Harry could see. One was an older man in the corner working on one of the printing presses of which was in pieces. Another was a woman in the near desk working on an article with large distorted pictures. It was the two people in the back of the office area talking to each other that Harry wanted to speak to.

"Excuse me," Harry interrupted the woman. "I would like to speak with the owner about an article I need printed."

"Adverts are usually mailed in, sir," the woman said before looking up. Once her eyes focused on Harry, she dropped her work on the desk and stood up quickly. "Mr. Potter, what a pleasant surprise." She spoke loud enough that the man in the back stopped his work as well to listen in on the conversation.

"Yes, well, I would like to speak to Mr. Lovegood if I could. It is an important matter."

"Yes, Mr. Potter, I will let him know you are here." The woman hurried off to the back room where Mr. Lovegood was speaking with a witch who could only have been Luna. After the woman relayed the message, it was Luna who came to get Harry.

"Harry," Luna spoke airily. "How nice of you to stop by. You wouldn't happen to have pictures of a Crumple-Horned Snorkack would you?"

"Sorry, Luna, I don't. I do have a matter that I need to speak with your father about though. May I see him?"

"Oh, too bad." Luna wondered back to her father seemingly forgetting about Harry. Once she rejoined her father, she turned and saw that Harry wasn't there. She craned her neck and waved Harry back to them.

Harry walked to meet the pair. The woman who they met first stared at Harry the whole time. Tonks followed closely behind Harry and when she came even with the woman she snapped her fingers in front of her face causing the woman to jump. Tonks smiled and joined Harry, Luna, and Mr. Lovegood.

“Harry Potter, what a pleasure to meet you,” Mr. Lovegood shook Harry’s hand wildly. “Oddment Lovegood, just call me Odd. Now, you have something to discuss?”

“Odd, I have a problem and I think you can help me out.” Harry spoke with confidence and determination that he never really showed outside of a fight for his life.

“And what problem could you have aside from the obvious?”

“In short, I need to remove Fudge from the Ministry and get someone better in his place. I have evidence and witnesses to repeated errors in judgment and even illegal activities. Can you help me out?”

Odd seemed to think it over before answering. “Not one to mess about with minor problems are you?”

“They find me, not the other way around, sir. Will you help?”

“I have no love for Fudge,” Odd said simply. “You helped me out before so it is only fair that I do the same for you. What have you got and when do you want it done?”

“Excellent,” Harry said and began to detail his plan and the information.

Half an hour later, Harry and Tonks left *The Quibbler* offices and went to the Apparition point. The streets were completely clear when Harry Apparated to the back garden of Number Four. Harry entered the house as did Tonks. They grabbed some food from the fridge and started up the stairs.

“Where have you been, Boy?” Called his uncle in his normal Harry-tone.

“Just don’t get it do you, Vernon,” Harry said shaking his head ignoring the question. “You are nothing to me and I am nothing to you. Goodnight.”

Harry continued up the stairs not showing any recognition to the sputtering coming from the living room. He closed the door after

Tonks and settled on the bed. He pulled the plate of food into his lap and started eating. Tonks did the same but kept an eye on Harry.

The food disappeared quickly and soon the plates were put on the desk. Hedwig had been watered, fed, and her cage had been cleaned. Harry looked into Tonks eyes and saw puzzlement.

“What is it, Nymph?”

“You aren’t the same. Something changed in the vault and I am concerned it isn’t real. I am afraid that you are going to come back down to earth and things will be worse than they were before.”

“It is for real.” Harry contemplated showing Tonks the letters or even telling her about them. “My parents left me letters. They wrote them shortly before we went into hiding. They answered some basic questions that I had always wondered about. I never knew how much affect those questions had on me until today. The answers I got are why I am different now. Those answers aren’t going to change, ever.”

“What were the questions or answers,” Tonks asked, “if you will tell me?”

Harry thought about it some more. “Was I loved? If I was loved, why did they leave me alone? What am I supposed to do with my life?”

“Of course you are loved, Harry. Do you know how many people love you?”

“Not really, but I do know that two people loved me. The two people who I don’t remember and have always wondered if they loved me. Now, I know that they did. Those seem like stupid questions to you, but they are all I have had my entire life. I had never heard the words, *I love you*, spoken to me by a parent.”

Tonks dropped her head and understood the basic need to know the answer to that question. It was so simple yet so vital. “I understand now. This whole change is from that?”

“Not completely, but I think my mum’s letter is okay to read.” Harry enlarged the trunk and withdrew the letter his mum had written. With a quivering hand, Harry turned it over to Tonks and waited.

Tonks held the letter with care as she knew that this was one of the most valuable things in the world right now as far as Harry was concerned. She pulled the letter out and unfolded it. She began reading and the tears immediately blurred her vision. She tried to read it from Harry’s point of view, but the words were so simple and basically loving that she never really changed her point of view.

As the it closed out, Tonks put the letter on the desk and grabbed Harry into a hug as she cried on his chest. She didn’t care if she was an auror or an Unspeakable or a member of the Order. She understood Harry better in that one moment than she had ever hoped to. A warm tear landing on her forehead told her that Harry had recited every word of the letter as she had read it.

She hugged him as tight as she could while trying to get control of her emotions. One look into Harry’s saddened but hopeful face made everything seem better. She did the only thing she could think of, she kissed him with all her heart. She ignored the saltiness of the beginning and drove right on to the sweetness of his mouth.

She kept kissing him for what seemed like hours and then began removing her shirt. She repeated the action with her pants. Harry cottoned on and mirrored her actions. Her neck was getting special treatment from him as she moaned in pleasure. Her hands had worked off all of his clothing except for the last bit remaining.

While she was distracted by his kisses, Harry had removed her bra and she was down to the last of her own clothing. An adjustment to their kisses led to Tonks pushing Harry down and her stripping off her underwear. She took the top position as Harry latched on to a breast and continued his previous efforts.

Tonks began grinding against him slowly earning her a moan from Harry. They continued until Tonks was almost foaming at the mouth and Harry was panting with restraint.

“Ready yet, Harry?”

“I want to, but I don’t think this is the right place. I really don’t want to remember my first time and have it be here.”

“Bloody hell. Well, whenever you find another place, let me know and I will drag you there myself. Wait, we can go to my place,” Tonks suggested hopefully.

In answer, Harry flipped Tonks over and started kissing her from top to bottom and returning to the middle for some time. The Silencing Charm was tested time and time again as Harry proved he was more than just a handsome face and skilled in magic. Tonks was exhausted after his skilled attention. Her breasts were heaving forcefully for a few minutes before she moved into action.

Tonks rolled Harry over and proceeded to return the favour ripping his underwear off. She was caught off guard as Harry proved he had more than enough stamina for only one time. Tonks stayed the course with only one thought in her mind and it wasn’t a clean thought. The time disappeared and soon Tonks was sprawled out on the bed next to an exhausted Harry.

“You are a special person, Harry, and I enjoy being with you. I hope you plan to stick around.”

“I have no plans to go anywhere you can’t go, Nymph. Do we have to be there at the same time again tomorrow?”

“Yes, we should be there at the same time again. I have a feeling that you will do better moving forward. So much of the missions are simply to get you in the right frame of mind. Never giving up is a hard lesson for most people to learn, but you had that one down from the beginning. Leading comes with experience and confidence. If you can act like you did today from now on, you will have the confidence thing down pat. Something tells me that Horace is in for a surprise in the morning. I hope he is ready for it.”

“I think I need some sleep right now. Good night, Nymph. Thank you for everything you have done for me this summer. I can’t believe it has only been a week and a half.”

“You were this person the whole time, Harry. You just didn’t know it yet.”

Harry wrapped his arms around Tonks smooth body and pulled hers close to his. He kissed her neck sending shivers down her spine and forcing her eyes open slightly. Harry looked into them and shared his all consuming feeling of contentment. Tonks reacted by kissing him and cuddling into him even more. Contentedly, they fell into a dreamless sleep.

Moody stood across the street from Number Four watching for any movement signaling the departure of Tonks. He had chosen Wednesday to check up on Tonks and Harry. He knew Dung wouldn’t speak out against anyone unless he was cornered like he was at the meeting. He saw Dung arrive almost at six, ending up only a few minutes late, and enough drinks short of being completely pissed.

He was there at half past eight when Tonks and Harry arrived in the back garden. Moody wasn’t sure how they got there. He couldn’t tell the difference between portkey travel and Apparition just by looking, but he didn’t see a portkey. He didn’t think Harry knew how to Apparate. No one had mentioned teaching him that during the meetings. Also, their arrival was silent from his distance. A novice at Apparition would have made enough noise to have been heard.

Moody watched Harry and Tonks enter the house in a way that proved that they had done so many times before this time. They pulled food out the fridge and went up to Harry’s room. Moody was confused and angered by the Obscuring Charm that blocked his vision. He had noticed it the second he looked at the house when he had arrived. It was a great big blur of color blocking out all of the room and a little bit of the surrounding area.

He waited for a few hours as the house grew quiet except for the baby whale who managed to occupy himself for a few minutes before zoning out in front of the telly again. Moody figured the meal wouldn’t take that long to eat and then a little time to talk afterwards. As the hour grew later and later, Moody started wondering exactly what was going on behind that Obscuring Charm.

The block was completely dark aside from the street lamps as Moody checked his watch. *'Midnight? Girl what are you doing up there, and I hope you have a good answer tomorrow when I ask. Oh, this just gets worse the deeper we get into it. I hope you know what you are doing, Albus. You better hope Harry doesn't think you are a painting the next time you tell him what to do. I know that Hogwarts has fireplaces big enough for the ending though.'*

Moody made himself comfortable with a Warming Charm and a Cushioning Charm. He settled in for a long night of watching a dark block and a bothersome blur.

I know someone started the name for Lovegood as Odd, but I do not know who did it first. To whoever you are, it works and thank you.

9. Friction

The morning dawned and the sun from the previous day was nowhere to be seen. Clouds had formed overnight and the day looked to be dreary and very London-like. Moody eyed the blur as he picked up movement. Tonks left the room first and went to the loo. Moody averted his eye back to the blur knowing that if Harry was to sneak out, it would be when others were occupied elsewhere.

He watched and waited and saw nothing. Tonks returned to the room and shortly afterwards, Harry left for the loo. Moody was becoming confused as he witnessed normal activities for people getting ready for a normal day. He knew that Harry was supposed to stay in the house unless Dumbledore expressly authorized otherwise. "Pretty much guarantees that the boy will be out and about all day just to spite Albus. It has been too long since he was young to understand the mind of a teenager. And this one is far from being just a teenager."

Shortly after Harry returned to the room, both left the room and made their way down to the kitchen. The only unusual thing Moody could see was that they were both wearing cloaks. He knew from overhearing past discussions that the Dursleys would not approve of that clothing choice. He watched the muggles take notice of the wizards and refuse to speak to them. He watched Harry serve Tonks and himself food from the cooker.

At ten of the hour, Moody moved to the back garden of the property while keeping his eye firmly on Harry and Tonks. He stood, covered by his invisibility cloak, and waited. They cleared away their plates and exited the house through the back door. Moody was about to remove the cloak when Harry shouted 'danger' causing Tonks to dive for cover and draw her wand.

Moody pulled the cloak off trying to avoid a mess of magic in a muggle neighborhood while raising his wand just in case spells flew. He turned to Tonks who had crouched in a defensive position and was about to cast a spell at him when a wand point stabbed him in the neck.

"Drop it or you lose your head!" Growled a fierce voice.

“Potter?” Moody queried not liking a wand planted firmly in his carotid artery.

“Moody,” Harry replied not lowering his wand. “Drop it or you will lose your head.”

Moody’s magical eye turned and fixated on Harry. Moody was surprised to see grim determination on the face of the teenager who was ready to kill him. “I am on your side, Potter.”

“Excuse me if I don’t blindly believe that,” Harry spoke evenly not budging an inch. “Drop your wand. I will not ask you again.”

“Alastor, please drop your wand,” Tonks requested. “Harry is not joking around here.”

“As if one could mistake the wand in my neck as a joke,” Moody commented gruffly. “Fine.” Moody dropped his wand and kept his eye on Harry.

“Tonks, pick it up and move away,” Harry spoke like he had been in this situation before. Tonks carried out his request and stood near the house with her wand held at her side. “Prove you are you.”

Moody’s mouth curled into a smile. “Now you are talking my language, Potter. Never trust anyone until you know who they are. Even then, don’t trust them much.”

“Prove you are you,” Harry said increasing the pressure on Moody’s neck.

Moody saw the intent in Harry’s eyes. The young man was serious and he was preparing to cast a spell. Any doubt in his mind was wiped away as Harry’s wand started to glow with a faint pinkish hue. “Crouch Junior had me locked up in my own bloody trunk for an entire year. Most embarrassed I have ever been in my life.”

The hue remained, but Moody saw Harry’s mood shift slightly. The wand was pulled away slowly and Harry took a few steps back to join Tonks at a safe distance. Only then did Harry lower his wand to a safe but ready position.

"You use those kinds of instincts and you will make it out of this war, Potter."

"Do that again and you won't, Moody." Harry had maintained eye contact from the beginning of the exchange until after his warning to Moody.

"That was an impressive display, Potter," Moody complimented. "Where did you learn all that?"

Harry seemed to think something over before answering. "Not from Dumbledore or the Order. After awhile, you pick up a few things. Now, why are you here? Checking up on me?"

Moody eyed Harry closely and read the body language. *'Ready for a fight and willing to get into one, I like it.'*

"He is checking up on me I believe," Tonks said. "You are aren't you?"

"Yes, Tonks, I am," Moody admitted. "I have a few questions and I need them answered to my satisfaction or I will have to go back to Albus with my concerns."

"I won't promise answers, but I will try to give them," Tonks relented.

"What is that Obscuring spell?" Alastor began. "Where are you going when you shouldn't be? What are you doing in his room?"

"Do not speak of me in the third person while I am standing here," Harry stated forcefully earning him a look from both of Moody's eyes.

"First off, it is an Obscuring spell that has been tweaked a little. Secondly, we are going where Harry wants to go and that is not for you to concern yourself with as I am the one guarding him. Lastly, none of your business."

"You know that isn't good enough, Tonks," Moody chastised the young woman. "You know Dumbledore's standing orders in regards to Harry's movements and it is my business. What is going on?"

"If Dumbledore has a problem with 'my' movements, then he can come down here and talk to 'me' about it." Harry took a breath and calmed himself before continuing. "And it isn't your business. I am safe, aren't I? That is the scope of your business, period."

"It doesn't work like that and you know it, Potter," Moody said slowly in a teacher-like way. "If you won't tell me, then I will have to speak to Albus about this. He needs to know when things out of the ordinary happen."

Harry sighed and forced more calm through his body. "Tonks stays in my room during the night. She has since nearly the start of summer. It is the only way to protect me from the Dursleys and the Death Eaters."

Moody watched both Tonks and Harry and neither moved nor spoke. "Getting a little too close, Tonks?"

"Like I said, it is none of your business, Alastor," Tonks said.

Moody wasn't positive about his theories, but he had a good idea what was going on. "And if I mention this to Albus...?"

"Nothing good would come from it," Harry answered the open statement with firm resolve keeping his wand in a ready position.

Moody looked at both of them again and nodded curtly knowing this wasn't the place to press for answers. "I believe that to be true, Potter. Off the record, I think Albus needs to reassess his stance on your protection for everyone's sake. If Sunday was any indication of the future, I hope he learns quickly."

"Then you are more optimistic than I," Harry replied.

"Alastor," Tonks spoke up. "We are going where we are going and that is that. If you are going to tell Albus, then tell him. Harry is going to live his life on his own terms."

"I can see that," Moody said while looking at Harry who still remained prepared for a fight. "If you will?" Moody held his hand out for his wand.

Tonks returned the wand and waited for Alastor to leave. With a curt nod, a smirk, and a swirl of his invisibility cloak, Alastor Disapparated with a soft pop.

“Well, that went smashingly,” Harry said dryly. “Now if Voldemort stops by the day will be complete.”

“Re-center yourself then we can leave. Do not let this bother you today. It is minor and nothing concrete was said or done.”

Harry did as Tonks asked. He spent a few minutes working through the frustration of having Moody hint at certain things. His anger at Dumbledore was more generalized in reference to his situation than anything specific. Once Harry was done, they Apparated to the team room and prepared for another day.

Thursday was more intensive teamwork training and Harry's new found confidence had made improvements in every attempt he made on each mission. Gone was the confusion and worry of the previous days of training. Harry took things as they came and did his best. Sometimes he failed and his team was killed off in a flurry of spells, but more often than not Team 3 held their own and accomplished the mission.

A few times, Horace had to add new challenges to the preset missions to increase the risks and dangers. Harry's mood seemed lighter and more stable to everyone who dealt with him that day.

When a mission could be thought out, Harry tried to do it. He would ask for advice and suggestions, but ultimately he made a decision and the team worked it out. A few times Harry changed his plan when things didn't work out. Of those times, only one failed in defeat.

“What in the bloody hell happened to you, Ceps?” Horace growled.

“What do you mean?” Harry returned in kind.

“I mean,” Horace began an animated reply, “what happened? You aren't the same person who was here yesterday. Something big changed. You are making tough choices and getting the job done.

You are looking like you do when you are fighting alone. Right now, you aren't looking like a big waste of my time. Imagine my surprise."

"An important question was answered yesterday," Harry said. "That is all."

"Any more important questions needing answered?" Horace asked hopefully.

"Not right now."

"If there are any," Horace offered, "let me know. This kind of improvement is impressive, especially at this level."

"If I didn't know any better, I would say that you just complimented me," Harry spoke evenly.

"Ha, you know me better than that, Ceps," Horace said while walking away.

"Yes, I do."

When Harry got home that night, he had many owls waiting for him. Hedwig was not impressed with the situation at all. The four owls were jockeying for first position in line. Harry chose the smallest owl, Pig, who he had to grab out of the air.

"Pig, stop it," Harry yelled as he managed to grab the bird firmly but soft enough not to hurt it." Harry opened the attachment and found two letters inside.

Harry,

What is going on? Why is Loony asking me questions about last year?

You have got to tell me, mate.

Hope you are okay.

Ron

"Well, Ron is confused," Harry said tossing the letter to Tonks.

"You could have given him notice, you know."

"That wouldn't be as much fun, now would it?"

Harry,

I hope you are doing well. How is Tonks?

What have you gotten yourself into? Luna is asking us some pretty interesting questions. You wouldn't be behind them, would you?

I hope you know what you are doing. I can read between the lines unlike others.

Ginny

"Ginny has it figured out at least."

"She is a smart girl you know," Tonks replied.

"Ginny is a mix of the Twins, her mum, and Bill. She isn't someone I want on my bad side."

"Smart plan," Tonks added. "Who are the others from?"

"Dean, Neville, and another kid who had the some of the same problems I had with a certain person."

"What do they want from you?"

"To know whether or not this is for real," Harry said. "They want to know if it is okay to talk about these things. I just need to tell them it is fine."

Harry wrote responses for each letter giving them the okay and sent them out via the owls the originals were sent with. In the morning, the post had a letter from Hermione asking the same questions only much more detailed.

Harry picked up the telephone and dialed Hermione's number which she had included in her letter.

"Boy, what in the bloody hell do you think you are doing?" Yelled Vernon.

"Cursing you if you don't shut up," Harry replied calmly. "Hermione please."

The seconds ticked by as Vernon stilled when a wand was directed at him by Tonks. Harry eyed Tonks happily as he waited for Hermione to pick up the phone.

"Hello?" called a sleepy witch.

"Good morning, Hermione," Harry said.

"Harry!" Hermione squealed forcing Harry to hold the phone out at arm's length. "Harry, how are you? How has your summer been? Are you taking care of yourself? Are those people treating you better?" The questions continued as Harry slowly moved the phone back to his ear and waited for Hermione to take a breath.

"Hermione," Harry said forcefully causing the woman to stop questioning him. "There, now I can answer you. I am doing better every day. My summer has been busy, as you have probably figured out by now. Being the smartest witch has that perk. I am taking care of myself smashingly. They are treating me better one way or another."

"What do you mean by that, Harry?" Asked Hermione.

"Well, Vernon is quiet right now because Tonks has her wand pointed at him."

"Oh, Harry, she could get into trouble doing that."

"Not likely, Hermione," Harry replied. "I think she could use it and get away with it." Harry said the last while smirking at his uncle who had the decency to look worried.

“Oh, you are going to get into so much trouble,” Hermione whined.

“Nothing new there, so at least I am familiar with that sort of thing.”

“At least you are in good spirits, Harry. What is going on with Luna?”

“I asked her to help me out with a few things. She is asking some questions about certain things and I hope you will answer them.”

“Do you really want me to answer them, Harry? These are serious questions that could cause some problems for a few people.”

“I am not worried about those people, Hermione. I am worried about us and our friends. Those people aren’t our friends.”

“I know that, but they are our leaders...”

“Not for long, Hermione. Just answer what you will and leave it at that.”

“Oh, Harry, are you sure this is a good thing to do right now? What does Dumbledore have to say about this?”

“Nothing, since he doesn’t know and I want it kept that way, Hermione. Do you understand me?”

“Harry, this isn’t a good idea. Dumbledore probably has things already worked out. Doing this could mess up his plans. You really should talk to him about this before you do this.”

“It is happening, Hermione. You can help me and see that it happens right, or you can refuse and watch it spin out of control.”

“That is not fair, Harry. This shouldn’t all fall on my head.”

“You were there for the big stuff. You know too much not to be a part of this. Are you going to help me?”

“Of course I am going to help you. What gave you the idea I wasn’t?”
Harry could picture Hermione’s hand on her hip as she said the words.

"I knew I could count on you. Just answer the questions and let me do the rest."

"You know what this will look like, don't you?"

"Yes, and I hope it does," Harry smiled a rather evil smile at his own words. Tonks laughed as she saw the pure enjoyment Harry displayed at that moment. "I should go now, Vernon looks like he is about to burst and you wouldn't want that to happen. Bye, Hermione."

"Bye, Harry. Take care of yourself and visit if you get the chance."

"Hermione is in and that makes everyone. I need to make that appointment before things get going."

"I can set that up for you today around lunch time," Tonks offered receiving a nod in reply. "Good, then let's get going."

"Good morning, uncle," Harry said to a very angry Vernon as he passed him leaving the house.

Lunchtime came very soon for Harry. He was led, by Tonks, to the team room where he took off his cloak and they Apparated outside of the Ministry. Harry entered the Ministry like any visitor would and found himself being escorted by Tonks to the second floor, Magical Law Enforcement offices. When the doors opened, Harry exited the lift and followed Tonks to Madam Bones' office. The assistant outside the office door addressed Tonks warmly and eyed Harry carefully.

The assistant wore form fitting robes and had her hair up in a twist. Harry thought she was rather attractive in a formal looking sense. She had very light brown hair bordering on blonde. Her lips were pert and complimenting for her face.

"Harry Potter to meet with Madam Bones," Tonks announced ignoring the warmth from the slightly built woman behind the desk. "He has an appointment."

The woman stopped herself before asking the question that had already been answered and checked the schedule. Finding that an appointment was listed, the woman became all business. "Auror

Tonks, you are correct that a meeting is scheduled. I will check with Madam Bones and see if she is able to keep the appointment.”

With a curt head nod, the woman left the room through a rear door adorned with a plaque stating it was Amelia’s office. Harry looked at Tonks and waited for her to look at him in return.

“Am I missing something, Tonks?”

“No, I dare say you picked up on it just fine, Harry.”

“Um, could you make sure I got it right then?”

“She has expressed an interest in me from the first day I came here. She would like to be friends, and close ones at that.”

“And you aren’t interested?”

“Right now, I have someone I like and that is enough for now. Why?”

“As protective as I should be, I find the situation intriguing nonetheless.”

“Merlin,” Tonks said under her breath. “Wasn’t last night enough for awhile?”

“That was yesterday, Tonks. Today is a whole different day.”

“Teenagers, insatiable,” Tonks muttered.

“Haven’t complained yet.”

“I wasn’t complaining, Harry. Far from it.”

The woman returning ended all teasing and flirting immediately. “Madam Bones will see you, Mr. Potter.” She eyed Tonks in a hungry fashion ignoring Harry’s perceptive eye.

Returning to the new and confident Harry, he thanked the woman and strode into Madam Bones’ office with Tonks following him closely to avoid being left in the same room with the assistant. They entered a

comfortable office. Harry thought it was a nice office with its whole purpose being functionality.

A couple pictures in the room were all that showed Amelia had a softer side. Everything else screamed of business and getting it done. The desk was organized and as orderly as possible. Papers and files were lined up and waiting to be reviewed. In the chair behind the desk sat an imposing witch. Her square jaw and monocle presented an impressive look to visitors.

Harry focused on his purpose and drove towards it. "Madam Bones, thank you for seeing me."

"Mr. Potter," said Madam Bones, "my pleasure. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I have a few questions and I would appreciate candor in your answers."

Amelia's monocle dropped into her lap as she listened to the direct answer she received. "I am impressed already, Mr. Potter. Please, you have my attention, do continue."

"It is just, Harry, if you will." Amelia nodded her understanding. "What is your opinion of Fudge?"

Amelia laughed forcefully. "I can understand your desire for candor prior to asking. That is a loaded question, you know. In government, you can rarely voice your true opinion without suffering for it."

"Nothing you say will leave this office, Madam Bones," Harry offered. "You have my word on that."

"I do not doubt your word, Harry. My niece has had good things to say about you and she is a good judge of character. Okay, I will answer your question. Fudge is the Minister of Magic and my boss. He is what we have."

"Madam Bones, I wanted your true opinion of him not some political response. If you are going to answer that way, then I will leave now

and save us both our time.” Harry let his frustration show earning him exactly what he wanted to hear.

“Fudge was barely acceptable during peacetime,” Amelia admitted. “Now, he is bugging up everything he touches. Is that more what you were looking for, Harry?”

“Yes, that is exactly what I was looking for. Who would you like to see replace him?”

“On the off chance that he resigns or becomes ‘unable to lead,’ I would hope that someone like your grandfather could be found to replace him.”

“My grandfather?” Harry asked completely thrown from his plans. “What does he have to do with this?”

“Your grandfather was an active member of the magical community. He wasn’t in the Ministry, per se, but he carried a lot of sway among the favourable purebloods and the general populous. He guided many Ministers and others into the positions they held or hold now. I, myself, am one of them. He said he liked my attitude.”

“And,” Harry paused trying to think of why he didn’t read more of his grandfather’s file while knowing it was because his father’s was right there as well. “What attitude is that exactly?”

“Oh, this is the good part, Harry,” Amelia said while her face softened. “I would tell him off when he needed it. He always liked strong women. I think that is why he welcomed your mum into the family so fast. She had spirit, she did”

Harry took the information in stride as best as he could. He wanted to follow that vain of discovery until it gave out, but he couldn’t. He forced, with all his might, to continue on with the plan. “Who would you like to see replace him?”

“I can’t really think of anyone offhand, Harry. Too many of them have been tainted by Fudge or are puppets of either You-Know-Who or Dumbledore.”

“Voldemort,” Harry corrected simply. “Not a fan of Dumbledore?”

“You wanted honest answers, right?” Getting a nod, she continued. “Dumbledore is a great man and a wonderful teacher. He is involved in everything in the Wizarding world. Some of it he can handle well, others he doesn’t seem up to the task. I dare say, you were one of the things he didn’t handle well. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“With all due respect, what do you know about it?”

“I was not a really close friend of your family, but I knew that you shouldn’t have been placed under your relatives care. From what my niece has told me, I am confident that you would agree. Am I wrong?”

“No, you aren’t wrong,” Harry paused again thinking how to proceed. “So you can’t think of anyone you would like to see replace Fudge?”

“Since this is purely an academic exercise, I could name a few people who could be at that point in five to ten years but not right now. It would take too much political maneuvering to get a vote of no confidence on Fudge even with his shaky position. Afterwards, the person who got him out would have nothing left to ensure the right person replaced him. That is the risk of getting rid of Fudge. He has friends and allies all over the Ministry. Removing him would make a lot of enemies and to get your enemies to support you would be very costly both financially and politically.”

“I see,” Harry said barely following the conversation. “So you couldn’t think of anyone then?”

“Not really, Harry. Sorry I can’t be of more help there. Now, our time is coming to a close. Do you have anything else to ask before my very efficient assistant comes in and hurries you off?”

“If Dumbledore told you to do something and he asked you to trust him on it, what would you say?”

“Explain it to me or I can’t help you, Albus.”

“Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, asked you to bend a few laws so he could do what he wanted without worrying about them getting in the way. What would you say?”

“If I have to follow the rules, then so do you,” answered Amelia with a surprised look on her face.

“Thank you very much, Madam Bones. You answered my questions honestly and in a way that I respect. Thank you, again.” Harry turned and started walking towards the door and reached it the moment that the assistant opened it. Harry strode out the door with Tonks following him closely again.

On the lift ride to the atrium, Tonks asked Harry what he was planning. He responded with a smirk and a squeeze of her shoulder. They left the Ministry and Apparated back into the Department of Mysteries. They ate a little from the kitchen and continued with the remainder of their training for the day. Harry was upbeat and his confidence levels kept Horace on his toes when running the training mission scenarios.

After the training, Harry took Tonks back to Diagon Alley and to the offices of *The Quibbler*. Harry spoke with Odd, alone, and when he finished he led Tonks out of the business and to the Apparition point. When they arrived at Number Four, Harry led Tonks to his room and closed the door.

“Tonks, how much stuff do you have at your place?”

“Um, why do you ask, Harry?”

“Just how much stuff do you have and how long would it take for you to pack it?”

“I have clothes, some pictures, and a few other things. I could pack it all in about thirty minutes, fifteen if I had to move quickly. Why?”

“I just wanted to know. Things are going to happen fast and I need to know you aren’t going to lose anything important when it does.”

“Harry, I think I know what you have planned so why would I be caught off guard on this? I am helping you do this, aren't I?”

“You are, but there are a few extra things I have going. I don't want to be caught off guard is all.”

Tonks responded to his worries by kissing him and more. They kept each other busy for hours by repeating what they did the night before with a few extra things added in. Tonks collapsed into Harry and fell asleep without a second thought. Harry remained awake for a little while longer creating a portkey he intended to use soon enough.

Friday dawned too early for Harry's tastes. He was very comfortable holding Tonks while wrapped in the blankets. He sighed and held Tonks close thinking about the last many days. *‘So much has changed. I actually have a chance, I think.’*

Tonks shifted into Harry more and her hair fell into her face which was resting on Harry's shoulder. He smiled and carefully moved the hair away revealing Tonks' real face. She responded in a positive fashion to the attention so Harry lightly touched her face smiling at how smooth her skin felt. He was completely captivated by the action and how Tonks moved in response to it. His smile grew when Tonks' eyes opened and focused on him.

“Morning, Harry,” Tonks yawned then smiled. She curled into him even more while taking a deep breath. “Is it time to get up already?”

“I am afraid so, Nymph. We can't skip today, can we?”

“Not the wisest suggestion, Harry. Horace would make us suffer for it.”

Under his breath, Harry said, “Yeah, not like that would be a change.”

“Soon enough, you will understand what he is doing and why he is doing it. You will thank him when that time comes. We all have.”

“Maybe so, but that time isn't right now.” Harry slid away from Tonks and made to get ready for the day.

When they arrived in the training room, Harry saw many new cloaked people. They were grouped into three-person teams just like Harry, Tonks, and Cal. Horace appeared and Marcus was with him wearing a serious look on his face.

“Good morning everyone,” Marcus announced. “Team two, you have a briefing in ten minutes in the conference room. Team three, you are still with Horace today. The rest of you will carry out your usual efforts when you are here.” Marcus left the room and any who saw him noticed his clouded mood.

“Chamel, what is wrong with Marcus?” Harry asked.

“Team two is the interrogation team, Praecept,” Tonks answered. “I guess the Ministry finally gave up on getting information out of the Death Eaters the nice way. Marcus hates using them for that purpose, but he will when it is necessary. I will tell you they aren’t nice about it. Robeen, Joslin, and Thor are very efficient at getting information. You do not want to know how they do it.”

Very softly, Harry whispered into Tonks’ ear, “I will not pity the people who tried to kill my friends. They are getting what they deserve. They could tell the Ministry what they wanted to know, but they chose not to say.”

“That is true, but I wouldn’t wish it on them. Team two is very good at their job.” Tonks shook her head slowly as she thought of stories she had heard about past interrogations.

“Team three, on me,” Horace barked. The team grouped around him and he gave them their mission for the day. “I am trying a loose mission here. No preset goal or objective. You are supposed to get from your starting point to the other side of the valley. What you meet, what you see, should be treated as hostile. Begin!”

The room faded and a forest appeared around them. The old looking trees and leaf-covered ground replaced the familiar room. Once the image stopped changing, a slight shimmer appeared in a rectangular shape.

Tonks looked to Cal who did the same to Tonks. Harry watched Tonks' face harden and the emotion fade. "What, Chamel?"

"Ceps," Tonks hesitated from continuing. "No matter what happens, remember your training. Stick to the mission and accomplish it. Do NOT worry about us."

"What in the bloody hell is going on, Chamel?"

"Keep your head about you, okay?"

"What is going on?" Harry never got an answer as spells erupted from the trees. Light flashed as bark was torn from the majestic trees. All Harry thought was that things couldn't get any worse. As they moved forward, Harry realized that he was wrong.

Team three fought as they retreated to a safer location. Harry tried to make a portkey to get his team out but every time he tried they were attacked. Left with little choice, Harry directed the team onward in the direction a stream flowed.

"What is going on?" Harry asked while he forced his way through a clearing populated with tall grass. "This is nothing like any of the other missions. Why is it so different?"

"No mission is going to be the same, Ceps," Cal answered. "They have to see if you can adapt to completely different situations."

"We need to make it to the end of the valley that we seem to be in right now," Tonks observed, pointing to the ground and how it sloped up on both sides of them.

"Makes a great funnel, don't you think, Chamel?" Cal commented as he swiveled on his heels when a noise sounded to their left.

Harry aimed his wand in the general location of the noise and waited for an attack. The team waited for a few seconds before advancing cautiously. Harry kept his eyes on the area where the noise most likely came from as he moved. A small jab in his back broke his concentration first. As he turned to look behind him, something hit him in the side of the head knocking him to the ground forcefully.

Completely dazed and confused, Harry rolled to the cover of a fallen tree as spells lit the underside of the overhanging trees above him. Shouts and yells echoed in the forest as Harry pulled himself into a crouch. With his left hand, he brushed the area where the jab had been and found a small trace of blood on his hand when he inspected it. The battle raged on in front of him, but Harry couldn't get his feet under him.

'I have to have a concussion. Why else would everything be so confusing.' The confusion subsided as Harry fired curses when he was sure he wouldn't hit his own team members. The fight slowed and Tonks found Harry secluded in his cover.

"Ceps, we need to keep moving. Can you walk?"

"I don't know. I can't get to my feet. I hit my head and everything is a little off now."

Tonks nodded and helped Harry to his feet. A few missteps later, Harry was walking on his own and leading his team deeper into the trees. They had been moving for nearly ten minutes when they walked into another fight. Harry threw up an Imprimis and an Absolvo Shield before driving off the path they had been on.

From his position on the ground, Harry watched Cal get hit in the chest by a dark green curse. He dropped to his knees and tried to fight on. A Severing Charm struck his left arm and it was separated from his body. A third jet of light tore a hole in his side exposing his ribs and muscle.

Harry yelled his name as Cal fell backwards. His eyes were completely devoid of life. Feeling his anger erupt, Harry jumped up and shot curses as fast as he could. He was trading off between wandlessly and wand as he launched his attack at the area where the curses had come from. The forest suffered a terrible beating. Trees were knocked down in a way only seen by a tornado or hurricane.

Fire licked up the trees catching dead ones on fire and setting the ground cover ablaze. The yellow and orange glow gave Harry an

ominous appearance as he battled the unseen adversaries. Tonks called to him from her position and told him to continue on.

"I am not going to leave you! We both go or we both stay!"

"Fine, you go first and I will follow," she answered.

The attack had ceased and Harry drove forward towards the objective. He was having problems focusing on anything but the immediate future. Everything seemed a little skewed from his point of view. As his steps took him deeper into the forest, Harry found he couldn't concentrate and it was getting worse.

"Chamel, I don't feel right. Something is wrong."

"Ceps, it is okay. Just keep going and don't worry about it. We have to keep going no matter what."

When they reached a stream that crossed their path, Tonks gave Harry a plan to make it to the other side. Harry recited the plan in his head so he could remember it and started crawling over a tree bridging the stream. A flash of light drew his attention to Tonks position on the original bank.

He saw Tonks get hit in the leg and fall to her side. She returned fire and leveled a small area of forest but the attack continued. Harry aimed his wand and fired a curse in the general direction of the attack. After his third spell, the tree he was on was hit by a forceful spell knocking him completely off his already very unstable center of balance. He grabbed onto the tree as tightly as possible, but he slid to the side. He found himself upside down hugging the tree with every ounce of strength. Another spell shook the tree violently causing Harry's grip to lessen and he fell into the stream.

Confused and disoriented, Harry resurfaced and watched the battle rage. Tonks was firing spell after spell so fast that her movements were nearly a blur. Harry aimed his wand and started firing spells to assist Tonks. He shouted at her to fall back, but she turned in Harry's direction and yelled for him to escape.

Harry swam to the far side not really knowing what he was doing. Once he got to his feet, he yelled for Tonks to come to him. He tried to draw fire from the attackers, but Tonks was struck down with a sickly, green curse stilling her body instantly. Harry yelled her name and forced as much magic into his spells as he could.

He had stopped avoiding any spells that weren't the Killing or Cruciatus Curse. His shields sung as spells struck them and ricocheted in wild directions. Harry moved backwards to more trees behind him keeping his rate of fire up. A deflected spell hit a thick tree sending wood in all directions including Harry's. He was knocked off his feet, again, into a muddy patch near the stream.

When he regained his footing, he saw Hermione fighting Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries. Harry immediately launched himself into the fight. Three Death Eaters fell from his spells before Hermione was struck down by the same purple curse as before. Harry yelled in frustration and fired Reductor Curses in all directions destroying the room they were in.

When the dust cleared, Harry saw the acromantulas surrounding Ron. Harry began casting Rumpere Lemniscus, a severing charm that forms a pink ribbon of magic, and directed it at any spider that neared Ron. The numbers of spiders kept increasing until both friends were surrounded and had no hope of escape.

Ron dropped his wand and fell to his knees in defeat. Harry moved in front of Ron and continued slicing the aggressive spiders in half. Body parts were everywhere when Ron was pulled away from Harry's side. He saw pinchers imbedded deep in Ron's leg as he was dragged, screaming, into the fray of moving creatures. Not knowing what else to do, Harry continued fighting.

His wand moved from side to side keeping the advancing wave of spiders away. He was knocked down when a spider jumped on him. His glasses were knocked askew and his breath was forced out of his lungs for a few seconds. His wand went dark before he could push more magic through it starting up his defense again.

A tree maze populated with cloaked and masked Death Eaters replaced the spiders. Harry didn't notice this until his Severing Charm

removed the head of a Death Eater. When one of their comrades fell, the others leapt into action firing spells in all directions.

As he moved and returned fire, Harry watched as friend after friend appeared amidst the fight and was cut down. Confused, tired, and abused, Harry fell into a numb pattern of cursing and moving. Nothing was making sense, but he continued on since he had no idea what else to do.

The battle lasted for an unknown amount of time until Harry was overpowered by the sheer numbers of Death Eaters. A few Cruciatus Curses breached his shields bringing him to his knees in pain. A frustrated yell was the lasting thing Harry did as a blast of green led to darkness.

Harry rolled over and felt a sharp pain in his arm and the rest of his body was screaming which woke him up fully. He opened his eyes and found the room was in focus and the smell of hospital flooded his senses. *'Bloody hell, what happened?'* Harry scanned the room and saw Tonks sitting in a chair near his bed talking to Cal. Horace and Marcus were standing next to them listening and chatting with each other.

Harry watched them for a few minutes listening to their conversations trying to understand the words. Nothing made sense and the words were confusing. Harry shook his head trying to clear a light fog that seemed to surround him. The movement caught Horace's attention.

"Healer, he is awake," Horace barked. "Antidote, now."

A healer walked over the Harry's side and forced a potion down his throat. Harry scowled and tried to fend off the healer but found his arms were held down by straps. "What the fuck is this?"

"Ceps, calm down," Tonks said softly. "Everything will be explained. Please relax and let the potion work."

Harry stared into her eyes and found that they were pleading for him to relent. He settled down and waited for something to happen. The fog lifted quickly and the world seemed to right itself as Harry felt his body reconnect with all its parts.

"Ceps," Marcus began, "you took a test that every member takes. It was a test that was un-winnable. No matter how many spells you cast nor how many people you had, you were going to lose. We wanted to see what would happen should that event occur during a mission."

"What he is trying to say," Horace interrupted, "is that we need to know when you will break. At what point will you give up and die. Before you get all worried, only Marcus, Chamel, and I saw the events. I know some personal stuff was brought into the testing and those things stayed with only those who know your true identity. If you didn't hate me before, you do now. Am I right?"

Harry stared into Horace's eyes and willed himself to see his thoughts. He forced his mind into the other's and found an odd scene playing out.

Horace was watching the battle with Harry, Tonks, and various groups of people. Harry saw Horace move his wand in different directions as if directing an orchestra. "Come on, boy, you can do it. Fight, damn it, fight. You handled losing Cal just fine now how about Chamel?" Harry saw Tonks fall under the force of spells. A ghost image showed Tonks walking away from the main battle and leaving through the training room door. Moments later, Tonks joined Horace.

"How is he doing, you think?"

"As well as I expected, Chamel. He is going to replace me when the time comes."

"What?"

"You heard me. He has the ability to out fight anyone here. His only problem right now, letting go of his goody-goody ideals. He is slowly learning that every fight he gets into is a fight for life. The minute he fights to survive, it is over. You watched him on that first day. Tell me he can't beat anyone."

"I know as well as you do, Horace, that Harry can make it where we would die. His new attitude will let him show us that now."

"What happened anyway? It is like night and day."

"I can't tell you. I am pretty sure it is a private moment and he would want it kept that way."

"Good for him. Now let's see if he can handle seeing his friends die, too. We know that he would die for them, but what about killing for them?"

Harry saw Hermione appear followed by Ron. Horace directed their deaths like it was a game. Then Harry watched more friends and the Weasleys appear only to be killed off as well.

The vision gained a reddish hue and Horace reacted quickly. "Shite, the kid's starting to overload the room."

"What do you mean," Tonks asked as she looked around the room.

"The room can only take so much magic at one time. It has to bleed off the spell magic used inside or the walls will get damaged. It happens when we get a few groups running missions together. You know that sometimes the training missions seem like they come in waves? Well, we have to do that otherwise the room could be damaged. The gaps are us allowing the room to bleed off the magic."

"And Harry did that?"

"It happens some times, but you know as well as I do that the kid packs a punch when he needs to. I can still remember his Crucio Curse from last time. Still gives me the shivers thinking about it."

"Things seemed a little off didn't they, Ceps?"

"Yes, what happened?" Harry asked confused and still processing what he saw and heard.

"Early on, we hit you with a potion that is kind of like a hallucinogen in its effects. How else would you accept the sudden shifts in scenery and new people appearing all the time? After Cal went through it, he asked for some of it for personal use." Horace shook his head. "Touched in the head he is."

"So you drugged me?"

“Yes. We drugged you and it worked like it has worked every time before. I will give you the secret to our methods; we get results one way or another. Don’t like it, there is the door.” Horace held up a finger pointing to the door leading to the hallway. “I will not apologize for making my people the best they can be. If you have any anger from this, use it to better yourself or just hate me. I am used to it.”

Harry watched Horace lean back in his chair as if he was waiting for an argument. Harry thought about the experience and could only think about what Horace had said in the vision. Coming to a decision about many things, Harry folded his hands and looked Horace in the eyes.

“How can I be better than I am?”

Horace nodded and smiled a true smile. Tonks gave Harry a warm smile and winked. Marcus stood from his chair and pulled out a long roll of parchment. He looked it over quickly and handed it to Horace. Horace repeated the action and looked to Marcus for confirmation and received it.

“Ceps,” Horace said standing up and drawing his wand slowly, “you did well today. As much of a bastard as I seem, I am only trying to teach you to stay alive longer. I think you understand that now.” Horace tapped Harry’s badge and made the adjustment. Harry watched and saw the green bar increase to a level of seven. Once the final bar filled in, the green column shimmered faintly and became a solid shape without any level markings. “You were in the 80’s or higher with every spell. Your wandless ability has improved and you are faster with it. I dare say many will respect you for this accomplishment.

“Next week, I think we will spend a few days together working on expanding your knowledge of spells. I will focus on offensive and defensive spells. I plan to teach you the Imperius Curse as well. It is a waste for you not to have that one down since you know the rest.” Horace turned to leave but stopped near the door. Speaking low but firmly, Horace said, “Keep your goal in mind at all times, Ceps. Always have a goal in mind otherwise you are just a waste of magic.”

“Wise words to remember, Ceps,” Marcus said. “I will leave you to the medical staff now. When they say you can leave, then you can leave. One other thing, Ceps, during the battle Horace saw that your glasses were knocked off. He didn’t like that since your aim fell dramatically because of it. We have charmed them with one of the charms we put on the cloaks. You can take them off, but no one else can unless they are keyed in just like the cloak. They can not be Summoned or knocked off. It isn’t much, but it should help you a little. Have a good weekend you two.”

Saturday came with little fanfare as Harry awoke to pain and soreness again. Hedwig was watching him intently in the way that said she wanted attention or there would be trouble.

“Yes, girl, we can go out today but don’t be mad if another owl delivers something today. It is just a paper anyway so it isn’t like it is that important.”

Hedwig puffed out her chest and stared Harry down as if he was a mouse about to be eaten. “Honestly, it isn’t that big of deal. You know you are the only girl for me.”

At that moment the door opened and Tonks sauntered in, still wrapped in a towel, with water dripping from the ends of her hair. Hedwig looked at Tonks and back at Harry. She tilted her head and gave him a piercing gaze.

“Well,” Harry began looking sideways at the floor, “um, well, the only owl for me?” Harry asked hopefully. Hedwig closed her eyes and deflated while on her perch. “It is different, girl.”

“Problems, Harry?” Tonks asked knowing something was going on since Harry was looking flustered and quite uncomfortable.

“Nothing you can help me with, Nymph.” Harry got out of bed and walked over to Hedwig and started petting her. It took a little while before she stopped resisting the affectionate gesture.

“You are whipped, Harry,” Tonks commented. She saw Hedwig give her a nasty look. “Not that it is a bad thing, Hedwig. You have put a

lot of work into Harry so I can understand your frustration, but I love you too.”

Hedwig seemed moderately satisfied with Tonks’ answer and gave into Harry’s efforts fully. “Bloody bird has me whipped too,” Tonks mumbled quietly. “Go figure on that.”

Crisis averted and no blood shed, Harry took Hedwig outside immediately followed by Tonks. The snowy owl took flight and Tonks watched her takeoff very closely. After a few minutes of silent study, Tonks spoke. “Is she going to circle around you and land?”

“Yeah, that is what she is going to do. Should be back in a few minutes.”

“So, it is supposed to come today?”

“Yeah, it should be here soon. I wish I could see their faces when it does.” Harry looked eager and excited.

“Something tells me that you will, Harry. I can almost guarantee you that one.”

Hedwig flew around a few more times keeping Harry’s attention on her and not on Tonks. The quiet Saturday morning in Little Whining was starting to become active when another owl flew down to Harry with something tied to its leg.

Hedwig eyed the owl venomously nearly scaring the young bird away. Only persistent calls from Harry assured the barn owl it was expected. “Hedwig please let the poor thing do its job. I told you about this earlier. Now, be good.”

The event was highly comical to Tonks. She had to fight back her laughs as Harry tried to get the mail while protecting the owl from Hedwig. Once relieved of its burden, the barn owl flew off as fast as possible. It never looked back as it pumped its wings as hard as it could.

“That wasn’t very nice, Hedwig,” Harry scolded. “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

Hedwig puffed out her feathers making herself look important and proud. "That is not how you look apologetic, Hedwig." Harry shook his head knowing he was not going to win the argument even though he was the only one talking.

"Talk about ineffective, Harry," Tonks joked. She knew that Harry could out fight many people, but he couldn't control his own owl if he had to.

Harry opened the mail and found a copy of the *Quibbler* inside of the wrapping. A small smile grew until Harry was openly beaming. "Perfect."

The picture on the cover showed Fudge in the Ministry atrium looking completely confused. The title read, "Confused, Lacking, And A Liar." The story went from page two all the way to page six. It detailed the attempts Fudge had made to take over Gringotts. It listed a few comments made by high ranking goblins concerning the Ministry's overt behavior over the years. The article recounted Fudge's position the previous year and the lies he made against Dumbledore and Harry. It continued on to list the activities of Dolores Umbridge while she usurped the Hogwarts staff. The use of the blood quill was written in great detail. The actions of the Inquisitorial Squad were also included.

Her admittance of sending Dementors after Harry was printed in larger text than most of the article as was her threat of the use of the Cruciatus Curse. Hermione's account of events was printed, but it seemed that Harry's words were foremost. Witness accounts' of Fudge accepting money from Lucius Malfoy were printed above the closing interview.

"What is your honest opinion of Minister Fudge, Harry?"

"I think that Fudge is a danger to us all. He has ignored evidence in the past that could have saved lives. He has allowed crimes to be committed inside and outside of the Ministry. He has tried to takeover Gringotts and we all know what would come of that. He allowed (He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named) to regain his body while he ignored the facts. Fudge has no idea what to do as Minister. We need someone else in that office that can do the job properly."

“And who would that be?”

“I think Madam Bones would do a good job. She is above the corruption that has been rampant in Fudge’s administration.”

“What makes you think she is the person for the job?”

“I asked her who would do well in the position. She couldn’t think of anyone who was ready for it. She knew of a few people who would be ready in a decade or so, but no one right now. I am sure she will be sending me a howler for even suggesting her to replace Fudge, but if I can stare into (He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named)’s eyes and live, again, then I think I can survive her howler. It is for the good of our society.”

Mr. Potter said You-Know-Who’s name. It was changed to limit our reader’s shock.”

When Tonks finished reading the whole story, she was quite surprised to find it an honest and balanced account of the last few years. “Most people will think this is a joke, since it is in the *Quibbler*, but you may convince a few of the more opened-minded ones.”

“Odd thought as much,” Harry explained. “That is why he changed the general format of this edition. He is thinking of running a more mainstream edition once a month. He said that they sell better and he likes seeing his articles in other papers around the world. As crazy as that nut is, he knows a lot about public opinion and how to use it.”

“Do you think this is enough to get rid of Fudge?”

“If it isn’t enough, then nothing will be,” Harry said shaking his head. “All I have is listed in there. I played my cards and watching is all that I have left.”

“Well, that is all you can do...incoming,” Tonks announced as Hedwig swooped down and Harry casually presented her a perch to land on.

“You need to relax, Nymph,” Harry said offhandedly. “Hedwig and I have done this for years. We know what to do.”

“Sorry, Harry, but I am new to owls like Hedwig. She is not like any other owl I know.”

Harry scowled a little. “Fits me then, doesn’t it?”

“Now, Harry, enjoy being you. I know many people who would love to be you.”

“Right, and they would just love to have no parents and a psychopath after them. I doubt anyone would last more than a few days being me. They would quit after the first attempt on their life. As sad as it is, I think I have gotten used to it.”

“Harry,” Tonks said moving to him and giving him an affectionate kiss and holding it for a few seconds. “I think you are right, but for different reasons. You are the only one who could be you. No one else has survived enough things to be Harry Potter. It takes a strong person to be you.”

She kissed him again and kept it up until a Message spell hit her ruining the mood. “Well, Dumbledore has read the paper. He is ordering a meeting today and you are to attend. He was very insistent on that part.”

“How bad do you think it is going to be, Nymph? Will I need to leave here or just defend myself?”

“I am sure a few might want to yell at you. One might want to hurt you, but I doubt that will be anything new. Most are probably going to support you anyway they can since it is the truth after all. I would stand up for yourself, but don’t do anything rash. We should wait as long as we can before we leave. I am not sure where we would go, but it is your call since it is your life. I still don’t know how you lasted as long as you have with these people.”

“No other option, Nymph. I never had another place to go or people to stay with before. Now, I have all of those. Besides, I deserve better than this place. I don’t care about the other things I just want some peace in my life for a few weeks. How long should I wait?”

“As long as you can, but it really depends on others right now doesn't it?”

“Yes, Nymph, it does.”

Hedwig flew around a few more times before they went in and prepared for the meeting. Harry altered the color of his cloak to a deep red and included his portkey ring in case he needed it. His knife was stowed comfortably in its place in his cloak. His wand was holstered and Harry practiced a few times retrieving it. Hedwig was in her cage and Harry asked her to stay there until he came back in case they needed to leave quickly.

Tonks prepared herself for another rough meeting. She knew Harry was going to take the brunt of it, but she hoped things worked out for the better. One thing she was confident about was that Harry's new-found confidence would be a major friction point for the Order. Independence always caused friction no matter where or when it occurs.

Before they left, Harry got another owl. It was from Amelia Bones and at the beginning she nicely, but firmly, yelled at Harry for bringing her name into the mess he created. As the letter continued, she became more understanding and supportive of his article. She promised an investigation into his claims of abuse and threats. At the end, she thanked him for believing in her abilities and wished him well.

“I am glad she didn't send a howler,” Harry commented. “They can be very loud and annoying.” Tonks simply laughed at his comments.

With a dangerous smirk and a firm kiss, Harry Apparated to the park near Grimmauld Place. He smiled at Tonks when she arrived seconds later. “Let's go ruffle a few feathers, eh?”

“You want to cause problems tonight, don't you?”

“Yes, Nymph, I do. It is about time they understand who I am and what I am willing to do. If it is possible, please try to keep them back so I only have to deal with one person at a time. I wonder how long it will take certain people to figure out I am not their pawn.”

As they walked up the steps and entered the house, Harry knew what his answer was but Tonks voiced it. "Too long, Harry, too long."

The sea of eyes watching Harry walk into the living room was nearly laughable, but the silence wasn't. Harry found friendly faces in those he knew would be supportive; Ron, Ginny, Fred, George, Remus, and even Arthur. Moody seemed almost appreciative with his look as was Dung. McGonagall and Molly looked severely disapproving as expected and Kingsley seemed watchful. Snape wore a vicious look not at all out of place. Dumbledore stood near the fireplace appearing worn and tired.

"Harry, I see that you have been busy lately," Dumbledore said scrutinizing Harry carefully. "Could you not have waited until the Ministry was more stable internally?"

"Time would not have made the Ministry more stable, Professor," Harry answered evenly. "You of all people should know that better than the rest of us. Fudge made them unstable. You left him in there for your own reasons. I had enough of him so I let a few select people know that."

"You have turned the Ministry and our society on its head, Potter," snapped McGonagall. "Honestly, I expect better sense from one of my students."

Harry turned and met her eyes not flinching from their penetrating gaze. "Everyone has a point where they have had enough, Professor. I hit mine and decided it was enough."

"And who are you to decide such a thing, Potter?" Said Snape icily.

"Ask Dumbledore who I am, Snape," Harry responded. "He knows better than most."

"This has nothing to do with the Headmaster, Potter," Snape replied moving towards Harry in a very snake-like manner. "It has to do with you getting too big for your head. Too much of your arrogant father and foolish mother shining through."

Harry's friends took deep, mouthy breaths at those words knowing they were the wrong things to say. Harry reacted instantly knowing what was coming before Snape finished.

In a blur of movement, Harry had his wand firmly planted in Snape's neck while his body was held against the wall. Harry's holly wand glowed a nasty shade of pink as a slight trickle of blood descended from the contact point. Albus had managed to draw his wand, but didn't get any farther as Tonks stepped between Snape and the rest of the room.

"You have been warned about voicing your opinion of my parents around me, Snivellus. Must I hurt you to make my point?" Snape's attitude seemed to deflate as he became aware of the fact that he was bleeding. "I wonder if Voldemort will leave me alone if I turn you over to him as the spy that you are. Do you think he would be interested in that deal? I am not sure."

"Harry, put down your wand this instant!" Commanded Albus.

Ignoring the order, Harry asked Snape another question. "Care to test my resolve on this, Snivellus?"

What little pompous superiority Snape had vanished when he stared into Harry's eyes. They were cold and sharp. Snape identified eagerness in the midst of the visible anger that burned in them. Swallowing his shattered pride, Snape answered. "No, Potter, I do not wish to test your resolve on this issue. I would also like you to never mention my current situation aloud ever again."

"I would like you to never talk to me again, but we don't always get what we want now do we?" Harry held Snape's eyes for a few more seconds before grabbing Snape's wand from his hand. Snape had been slowly drawing his wand during the discourse. "I will hold on to this until I leave. I wouldn't want to have to hurt you."

Harry took the wand and dropped it into his left pocket and stepped away from Snape. The trickling blood flowed more freely from his neck once the wand was removed. Snape checked the injury and found it to be quite acute for no spell having been spoken. The greasy spy applied pressure to the wound but held his tongue.

"Harry, how could you do that?" Albus asked roughly.

"He had been warned," Harry answered calmly. "Next time, I will not stop myself from hurting him severely. I will not be abused by anyone anymore. Surely you were able to figure that out from the paper."

"Cornelius is a simple man with simple ideas," Albus offered.

"He is a fool and fools can be made into the tools of determined people," Harry stated. "Is that why you wanted him to remain? Was he going to be your tool?"

"That is not fair, Mr. Potter," McGonagall snapped.

"It is a very fair question, Professor," Harry returned. "I haven't heard an answer to my question, Professor. Do you intend to answer it?"

"No answer I give will satisfy you, Harry," Albus relented.

"Because you can not answer the question honestly and still maintain your austere of the moral high ground," Harry retorted. "You know that as well as I do. I have learned well, haven't I?"

"Yes, Harry, you seem to have picked up quite a bit as of late," Dumbledore admitted. "Anymore surprises?"

"Many, actually," Harry smiled while speaking.

Tonks took the non-verbal truce literally and moved to the side so Harry was again fully visible to the room. Snape had found a corner to nurse his wounds and remained silent. Molly wore a shocked look about her and Arthur seemed to be holding her up slightly.

"Now, the article couldn't have been that big of a deal," Harry said. "It was just one article in the *Quibbler* after all."

"An article that has been picked up by most of the real papers in the Wizarding world," Fred began happily.

"And been talked about by everyone I have met," George continued smiling.

“And had the Ministry in an uproar since,” Arthur finished meekly.

“Really?” Harry asked innocently with a look to match. “I never would have guessed.”

Ron barked out a laugh, Ginny stifled hers, but Bill let his escape fully. “That explains all the time you have spent at Gringotts then.”

“Gringotts?” Albus said looking at Tonks angrily.

“I went where I needed to go, Professor,” Harry admitted. “You will leave Tonks alone. If you want to be mad at someone, then be mad at me.”

“Tonks, you are removed from Harry’s detail effective immediately,” Albus ordered.

“Fine,” Tonks said nonchalantly. “Now, I am free to spend my free time how I see fit. Harry, I don’t think I will change my current plans if that is okay with you.”

“Sounds good to me, Tonks,” Harry said staring Albus down.

“Tonks, you are not to visit Harry,” Albus commanded more forcefully. “You have been a bad influence thus far this summer.”

“She has been a great influence, Albus,” Harry spoke with sharpness to his voice. “She has helped me get through many things you failed to even pay attention to. She has made this summer one I can live through.”

“This is for your own good, Harry,” Albus said but realized too late that he had said the wrong thing.

“My own, fucking good, eh, old man?” Harry challenged. “I will give you for my own good. Getting locked in a cupboard for years. Getting starved for years. Getting hit, beaten, ridiculed, and ignored for years. Having my life put in danger more times than I can count.”

“Twenty-two,” Ginny offered earning her a nasty look from her mum and thumbs up from her brothers.

"There you have it, twenty-two times," Harry added. "All for my own good. I think I would like to try what is bad for me. Maybe that is a little safer. I doubt it could be more dangerous considering my past. Care to explain to the Order how you can ignore me being knocked unconscious when I got to the Dursley's at the beginning of summer?" Receiving no answer, Harry nodded. "I didn't think so. Kind of hard to explain that one, isn't it. If anyone wants to hear about it, ask Tonks. She saw most of it and stopped my uncle from killing me most likely."

McGonagall's head snapped to look at Albus before anyone else. She wore her sternest appearance at that moment. Any student would have crumbled under it. Albus simply closed his eyes before meeting Harry's accusatory gaze. "Nothing is easy when it applies to you, Harry."

"Pathetic excuse, Albus," Harry shot back. "My life has never been easy, but it could have been better if you hadn't been involved in it. I was supposed to go to Sirius when they died. If not him, then Remus. If not him, there were many others. I have the list in case you want to read it. They made special note that I was never to go to the Dursleys. You ignored their wishes to carry out your own plan. My life has been one disaster after another because of it. You are responsible for that. I will never forget that."

The Order members were looking amongst themselves trying to find out if the others knew the truth. Everyone wore the same lost, shocked expressions except for Tonks. "Tonks, did you know this?" Kingsley asked.

"I learned all of it in the last two weeks, Kingsley," Tonks said. "That should explain why I am on Harry's side and not Dumbledore's."

"Did you tell Albus of this when you learned about it?" Moody asked.

"I told him about the assault at the beginning of the summer, but the rest of it I kept in the same confidence I received it."

"How could you not tell us?" Molly demanded looking like the mother bear she could be.

“Albus ordered me not to tell anyone,” Tonks defended. “He said the matter had been handled by my actions at the time.”

“How could you not tell me, Tonks,” Molly accused her.

“Leave Nymphadora alone,” Harry yelled. “She left it as it was at my request. Nothing was going to come of it in the first place so why drag it out?”

Many noticed the familiar name Harry used and the lack of Tonks’ normal response to it. No one said anything about it as Harry’s stance was becoming more threatening as time went on. Moody and Snape held their comments because they had seen the same look up close. Harry was serious and he was going to get what he wanted one way or another.

The tense mood hung in the air for what seemed like hours. The sound of the oil lamps hissed and sputtered as the air moved about the room. Harry was the first one to break the silence.

“Why must you make this so fucking difficult?” Harry asked Albus. “Why couldn’t you have obeyed my parent’s wishes? I would have been happy then and not how I was.”

“You would have been in danger, Harry,” Albus replied with the decency to sound like he regretted his choice then.

“If you haven’t been listening, Albus, I was in danger,” Harry spoke dangerously. “I was in danger very minute I was in that house. You never bothered to check up on me did you? Just lock me away until you had to bring me back. You have no idea how hard it was and still is. You know about Voldemort’s past. How different are our pasts? Is there much difference at all?”

Albus looked to the floor and sighed looking very weak and frail. “No, Harry, your pasts are quite similar. The real difference is that you chose to do what is right not what is easy.”

“Things can change, Albus,” Harry said holding the old man’s eyes when he looked up. “But not today. I suggest you stop the lies and start helping to fix the problems. Fudge is a problem and I am trying

to fix it. If you want him to remain, then you will have to fight me to do it. I want him and all of his people out.”

“I understand your position, Harry, and I respect the effort you have put forth, but I could have offered a few good choices to replace him.”

Harry scoffed at the comment earning him a few reproachful looks and many more questioning ones. “You want a puppet in the minister’s office. I want someone who will do the right thing not because you want it, but because it is the right thing. Amelia couldn’t name me one person who could do the job properly. She was too honorable to name herself so there you go. That meant a lot to me. What sold me completely was the fact that she told me I had to follow the rules too. She already sent me a letter telling me off for suggesting her to replace Fudge.”

“She did, but that letter ended with her thanking you,” Tonks added with a cheeky smile.

“All the more reason to hope she replaces him,” Harry returned.

“Ah,” Arthur spoke up from the sidelines, “it is looking like she will get the job. The Ministry heads are backpedaling from Fudge faster than they flocked to him. Associating with Death Eaters really hurt him there. Most of them have lost family to the Death Eaters so they want nothing to do with them or their supporters. In a few days, Fudge could be ousted and even jailed. I know I saw Dolores go into Amelia’s office today. Never saw her leave though.”

“May she rot in Azkaban,” Harry said with conviction.

“Not to draw more attention to you, Harry,” Arthur said softly, “but most of the people I have talked to are not willing to stand against you. They know what happened at the Ministry. They know you have faced You-Know-Who a few times and what has happened to Fudge has proven that you are not someone to stand against. You offered Amelia’s name and most of the voting group aren’t willing to fight it. They do not want the appearance of siding with the wrong side.”

“And what side is that?”

“The side that isn’t yours. The older ones remember what your grandfather did for the Ministry and they miss that help.”

“Funny, no one has ever been on my side before except for a few people who happen to be in this room.” Harry looked at Hagrid, Ginny, Ron, the twins, and the other Weasleys. Remus and McGonagall received longer looks as they seemed to make their choices based on the facts and not solely affection. “I just want a good person to be Minister. Someone who will protect the weak and help the strong to win this war. My grandfather is another thing I never knew about and I wish someone had bothered to tell me about him.”

“I didn’t want to give you more people to mourn, Harry,” Albus said sadly.

“I would like to make those decisions now,” Harry said with resolve. “It is my life and my family. You kept too much from me and now I want to know it all. Now, on that note what is this meeting about?”

Albus scanned the room for any one else with a topic. Finding none, he answered the question. “I wanted to find out what your plans are with the Ministry, Harry. What are you going to do when Amelia replaces Fudge?”

“What am I going to do?” Harry asked with confusion. “Nothing. She will be the Minister and I can live my life without worrying about the Minister of Magic trying to kill me or get me arrested. I think that is enough to hope for don’t you? That is why I asked her what she would do if I broke the law. I have a fair shot at being normal, well, as normal as I can be I guess.”

“Yeah, normal,” Fred began.

“So normal you can topple,” George continued.

“The bloody Minister with a newspaper article,” Fred finished.

“You two are really twisted, you know that, right?” Harry asked.

“We know, but its fun,” both said.

"I guess," Harry relented. "So this was the only reason for this meeting? If that is all, I think I would like to talk with friends then."

"I would like to revisit one thing, Harry," Albus admitted. "I believe that Ms. Tonks has gotten too close to you. That is a dangerous thing to do when you are protecting someone. I don't believe she will be as effective as before. I would like to replace her with Emmeline."

Harry took a deep breath, calming himself, before responding. Many in the room leaned back as they had witnessed what happens when Harry had to calm himself before speaking. He met Tonks' eyes as he spoke. "With all due respect to you, Ms. Vance, Tonks will be staying on my guard detail. You can not remove one of the few people who are willing to tell me the truth, Professor. She has helped me this summer and I am not willing to give that up. I thought we had settled this earlier."

"Harry this is for the best," Albus pleaded.

"I told you I will make decisions about my life and what is best for it," Harry spoke forcefully leaving no doubt or room for error. "Tonks stays as long as she wants to."

Albus turned to Tonks immediately wearing a firm look on his face. He stared her down as he inclined his head silently requesting an answer but making it clear which answer he wanted.

"I will stay on Harry's detail, Albus," was Tonks' reply. She never looked away from Albus while speaking and the room knew she meant what she said.

"Nymphadora," Albus queried in a slightly scolding tone.

"Never call me that, Professor," Tonks snapped back. "Respect my wishes."

"It seems," Harry offered, "that he has problems respecting others' wishes or concerns." The living room fell into silence again as no one wanted to be the first to speak and draw the attention of everyone. Minutes ticked by before Harry's frustration got the better of him. "Where is Kreacher?"

"Ah, Harry," Remus said looking sideways. "That was something I wanted to talk to you about. Um, well, you see, I kind of had a rough time of the last full moon. Well, Kreacher kind of broke into the room I was in and, well, he didn't survive the encounter." Remus dropped his head as he finished. The shame was obvious and he honestly looked sorry. "I can pay to replace him. Touched in the head or not, he did belong to you."

"Kreacher is dead?" Harry asked, amazement shining on his face. "Well, that saves me from dealing with him myself. Thank you, Remus."

"Harry, I killed Kreacher," Remus wanted to be yelled at for letting the werewolf beat him.

"And good riddance too," Harry replied. "I had been worried about having to kill him myself for what part he played in getting Sirius killed. Thank you for helping me, Remus."

"But I didn't know, I didn't mean to, I..."

"Like I said, good riddance," Harry smiled. "Did you toss him in the bin or what?"

"There wasn't that much left, Harry," Remus looked even guiltier. "It wasn't pleasant."

"No worries, Remus. Thank you for doing that. Now, is there anything else?" Harry avoided looking at Albus until last. What he found was confusion and deep thought when he did look at the old man. Harry held his gaze ignoring the slight itch in his head when Albus tried to penetrate his thoughts.

Harry stopped the attempt by narrowing his eyes and fingering his wand discretely. Most people started side conversations as they waited for someone to make a decision.

Albus sighed and rubbed his aged face slowly. "Ms. Tonks, you shall remain on Harry's detail until he can be moved safely. Harry, please work with us and not against us. If you want to do something, ask one of us. I only want to keep you safe. That is all I want."

"I will look at every situation and decide then," Harry offered. "I am making my own choices and I accept what comes of them. It is my life after all."

"That is what I am trying to protect, Harry."

"But I have to live it, Professor," Harry said softly. "I have to live it. I only want it to be worth living. Is that asking too much?"

Albus stopped his immediate answer before sincerely responding. "No, Harry, it isn't too much to ask. I will try to do better by you in the future."

Harry nodded to Albus in understanding before turning to his friends and smiling. They quickly moved out of the room and up the stairs leaving many surprised people behind. Tonks knew that she had to stay and hear what was said to her and about Harry.

"Albus," McGonagall snapped as only a professional teacher could. "What have you done to Harry to make him like this? He has never acted like this nor spoke to people like he did to you just now."

"I am afraid that all of my failings concerning Harry are showing themselves," Albus closed his eyes and sighed again. "Could things have been that bad? Were they that horrible to him?"

"Yes, they were," Tonks added. "And then some."

Albus appeared to want to ask Tonks a question, but he was interrupted by Minerva.

"What were my words to you all those years ago, Albus?"

"They are the worst sort of muggles imaginable,' I believe," Albus recited.

"You were right, Minerva," Tonks said. "I have never been so close to cursing muggles as I have been in the last two weeks. And I would have enjoyed it too."

Minerva stayed quiet and looked very pensive. Molly, who had watched and listened to everything that had been said, seemed ready to voice her opinions.

"I want that poor boy removed from those evil people, Albus." Molly had her hands on her hips and her piercing eyes were boring holes into the Headmaster.

"Soon enough, Molly," Albus gave in. "I will need to get this place presentable or secure your home more than it is before that can happen. Harry must be kept safe."

"Either way, Albus," Molly demanded. "You have a week or I will remove him myself. There are enough of us to keep him safe."

"I do not doubt your abilities, Molly, but you would be putting your whole family in danger for Harry." Albus waited a few seconds before continuing. "As willing as you and your family are to do that, Harry is not. He would fight you on that. He doesn't need anymore lives put at risk for his. I fear that another death could shatter him. I am surprised at how well he has handled the loss of Sirius to be honest. He took Cedric's death much harder."

"He has grown up, Albus," Moody suggested. "He has been through more since Cedric. It appears he will only get stronger too." Moody's normal eye turned to Snape who still held a hand over his wound. The blood had stopped flowing, but the potion master had remained silent after Harry released him. Moody recognized that look well having worn it only days before.

Finally seeing a break in the conversation, Albus voiced his question. "Tonks, how close have you and Harry become in the past weeks?"

"What are you trying to ask, Albus?" Tonks retorted evenly.

"How close are you and Harry?"

"I know things he hasn't told others," Tonks admitted giving little ground. "He trusts me because I promised I wouldn't lie to him. I have kept my promise. How about you?"

“What promise are you referring to?” Albus asked.

“That answers my question.” Tonks’ dismissing response drew quite a few raised eyebrows. “What? I know about things that you lot would be shocked to learn. Albus, Harry has told me a lot. Would you care to guess exactly what he has told me?”

“No, I do not think I would.”

“Wise choice,” Tonks said. “And on where Harry goes, I would suggest you let him decide. You have been here. You have seen how he is reacting to being handled. Harry can make his own choices. Does a pretty good job of it too.”

“He is still a boy,” Snape spoke up.

“I would not call him that, Snivellus,” Tonks said firmly. “Next time, you might just lose your head. If you couldn’t tell, Harry was about to cast the Ribbon Severing Charm. I think that would have been enough to remove your greasy head. Don’t you?”

Molly gasped as did a few of the other members. Minerva shook her head in disbelief. Moody smirked and spoke, “That was what he was about to do to me, wasn’t it?”

Tonks looked to Moody and smiled. “Yep, only he held back more that time. He had a good idea that it was you. But he isn’t taking any chances.”

“Alastor, you have withheld something,” Albus said.

“I have,” Moody raised his head and smiled appreciatively. “I didn’t think it was anything to mention. I made a poor tactical choice and nearly lost my head for it. He is quick.”

“Alastor?” Albus commanded.

Speaking to the room, Moody gave the warning. “If Harry tells you to drop your wand or anything else for that matter, I would do it. He had me in the same position as Snape earlier this week. At least I was

smart enough not to push him to the point where he almost killed me.”

Snape looked from Albus to Moody and scowled. “He didn’t ask me to do anything.”

“You had been warned not to insult his family,” Tonks offered gleefully. “I suggest you remember that. Harry is not going to stand for you insulting his parents. If you do it again, I doubt he will stop the spell. You know you will die if he casts that spell at that range.”

“He can’t kill,” Snape said forcefully. “He is too weak, too good to kill.”

“Things change, Snape,” Tonks said. She looked around the room finding many surprised expressions. “Harry had faith that we could protect him before. Now, he knows that we can’t. He is fighting for his life and he will do what he has to do to live. I believe that the goody-goody Harry died in the Ministry along with Sirius. Now, the survivor Harry is what is left. I am sure Moody and Snape can explain what that Harry looks like and what he is capable of.”

“What happened to Harry?” Albus asked aloud.

“Look at his life and ask what you would be like, Albus,” Tonks said. “Now, I have had enough fun down here. I had better go upstairs and check on the others. Evening all.”

Tonks bounced up the stairs and searched out Harry. She chose the Point Me spell and found Harry in Sirius’s old room. His friends were laughing and joking with him. More than once, Ron replayed Snape’s response to Harry earning him laughs and cheers.

“Tonks,” Harry announced buoyantly. “Come, sit down.”

Tonks saw a small place between Harry and Ginny on the bed. Ginny smiled and moved over a little more while smirking devilishly. Tonks beamed to all in the room and made her way over to the bed. As she sat down, Ginny shifted towards Harry knocking Tonks into Harry and nearly off the bed in the process.

The twins hooted and Ron laughed as Tonks slowly got off of Harry and settled into the newly wider spot Ginny had offered in the beginning. Ginny was laughing at the situation she had created.

"I am sure Harry doesn't need you to throw yourself at him like that, Tonks," Ron said with a lopsided smirk.

"Nah," Fred began. "I think our Harry."

"Really likes the women," George continued, "on top of him."

"He was never that smooth with the ladies," Fred finished.

Smiling, Tonks replied, "I think Harry can handle the women just fine. He has those Quidditch hands so you know..." Tonks left the statement open. The men laughed giving Tonks a chance to discretely elbow Ginny in the side earning an 'oof' from the sneaky girl. Tonks smiled widely when Ginny looked at her innocently.

"So, what did they say down there?" Harry asked Tonks.

"More of the same," Tonks said. "But Moody agreed that they should let you do what you want or they would get more of what happened to Snape."

"That was brilliant, Harry," Ron complimented. "Could you do it again before you leave?"

"That depends on him, Ron," Harry replied. "Now how are things with you guys?"

The night continued with Harry hearing about the Burrow and the normal things that occurred there. He was happy and relaxed when Tonks tapped him on the shoulder showing him the time.

"I guess it is time to leave," Harry said. He wished them goodnight shaking hands with the twins, smacking Ron on the back, and hugging Ginny. Tonks waved to everyone and gave Ginny a fake scowl before following Harry down the stairs. Most of the Order members had already left, but a few remained. Snape was still in the same corner he had retreated to when Harry released him.

“Evening,” Harry told the room. Most of the people in the room smiled and waved, but Snape walked towards Harry. His lips were tight and set as he held out his hand. Confused and not sure what he wanted, Harry waited until Snape spoke.

“My wand, Potter.”

“Oh,” Harry said. He had forgotten that he still had Snape’s wand in his pocket. He pulled it out and handed it to the potion’s master tip first. Snape snatched it out of his hand quickly, but kept the point away from Harry.

The over-grown bat made a hasty retreat from the House of Black. Harry watched him go while waiting for an attack until the door closed. “Well, that was uncomfortable.”

“Ya need ta work on your understatements, ‘Arry,” Hagrid said smiling like he had found a baby dragon recently.

“I do not care what he thinks or wants as long as he doesn’t do or say anything around me.” Harry nodded his head to confirm his position as he spoke. “Well, shall we leave then, Tonks?”

“Sure, Harry,” Tonks answered. They left the house and once the door was closed they Apparated to the back garden of Number Four.

“Eventful night, wouldn’t you agree, Nymph?”

“Quite, Harry.”

“Sorry about the name slip. I messed up.”

“No problem, Harry. You said what you said and you meant it. Now, I just need to reward you for standing up for me. What would you like?”

They entered the kitchen and walked up the stairs. They never noticed Vernon sitting in his chair in the living room. He followed them with fierce eyes noting every motion.

“I am not sure,” Harry said looking like a confused fifteen-year-old. “Maybe we could kiss or something.”

Once Harry closed his door and put up a Silencing Charm, Tonks grabbed him and threw him on the bed. "Or I can snog the life out of you among other things." Tonks kissed him deeply and passionately. She explored his mouth as if her own life depended on it.

When they finally came up for air, Harry managed to squeak out, "Or we could do that," before Tonks pounced on him again. Their clothes were tossed off as they became more and more involved. Hedwig had left the room when Tonks' bra nearly hit her in the head. She squawked once as she took flight out of the window.

Tonks tested Harry's stamina a few times that night earning her the same treatment in return. The sheets were firmly wrapped around them when sleep took them after a very tiring and stressful day.

Thanks to [cjcold](#) for giving me the idea of the summon-proof glasses and the un-winnable test.

Thanks to [fanficlover38](#) for making sure I deal with Umbridge. She may or may not return.

10. Potter Estate

With a soft crack, Minerva McGonagall appeared on Privet Drive. The all-business professor strode from the cover of the trees and bushes in the park towards Number Four. She had traveled this very same path years ago only in feline form. *'Why does it feel like I am returning to the scene of the crime?'* As early as it was, Minerva kept an eye open for any muggles who might be out. She saw none on her trip to the Dursleys. *'I should have checked up on him. I will never forgive myself. Lily has always been my favorite. I should have taken better care of her son. I can never forgive myself.'*

Reaching her destination, she searched for Dung who was supposed to be on duty. She heard muffled snores from near the garden wall she had sat on when Dumbledore had arrived that fateful night. "Good-for-nothing drunk." Minerva shook her head trying to refrain from cursing the hopeless man.

She looked up at the dull-looking house. She never understood how muggles could enjoy living in such boring places. Not a single place on the block had any real character. Everything was the same. Every house had the same appearance and feel to it. *'How can Harry Potter live here? How could I have left him here with them?'*

Ignoring the self-hating thoughts, Minerva advanced towards the door. Hearing a crack behind and to the left of her, she spun around and leveled her wand at the source of the noise. Dung's snores continued on unaffected. What, or rather who, Minerva saw nearly brought a smile to her face.

Molly Weasley stormed towards the front door. Her apron flapping in her wake and her wand already out; she looked ready to do battle. Clearing her throat, Minerva lowered her wand. Molly continued on unfettered.

"Molly," said Minerva.

Molly stopped and turned to the voice. "Professor? I didn't see you there." Molly looked around the yard as if she knew she wasn't supposed to be there in the first place.

“Molly, after nearly seven children I believe we are on a first name basis. The twins first year should have proven to you that much.”

Molly looked guiltily at the grass beneath her feet. “Minerva, yes, I remember those days. If only things were as bad as a few pranks and some stolen knickers.”

“If only,” Minerva offered sadly.

Changing the mood, Molly asked a tentative question. “What are you doing here, Minerva?”

Unable to stop her forceful snort, Minerva let it flow into a deep chuckle. “It would appear the same thing as you, Molly.” Minerva motioned to the wand in Molly’s hand. “Coming to check up on Harry?”

Molly looked at her wand and sighed mournfully. “In a heartbeat, Minerva. I love the boy as if he was my own. I would protect him with my life if I had to.” Taking a breath and speaking with grim determination, “He is my kid. That is all there is to it. He has no one else”

“He has that way about him, doesn’t he?” Minerva asked already knowing the answer. “He got that from his parents. James could infuriate you one minute and charm you the next. If Lily hadn’t captured his eye, the Wizarding world would have had a dangerous rogue on their hands. No women would have been safe. And I know I couldn’t have said no to Lily if she asked me for something. So sweet and lovely.”

Minerva stopped and dabbed at her eyes with her hand. “I find myself doing that more often, Molly. Whenever I think about her or increasingly when I think about Harry. He has been through so much. How can you not?”

“I understand, Minerva.” Molly moved to her and wrapped a consoling arm around the tall woman’s waist. A few tears fell from Molly’s eyes as well. “They were a family of three. We are a family of nine, well ten. How many of my babies am I going to lose? I didn’t know his parents

very well, but I have never heard anything bad from anyone except Severus.”

“There is someone who should steer clear of Mr. Potter for the near future,” Minerva said with a slight smile. “I will deny it if asked, but Severus had better learn to choose his words more carefully around Harry. I was afraid that Harry was going to cast that spell last night.”

“I think he almost did, Minerva. I have never seen Harry that cold. I thought for a minute that he was going to kill Severus.”

“Did you see Tonks?” Minerva asked. “I think she half expected Harry to do it. She has become another determined friend of the boy. I think you know all about that condition, am I correct?”

“Ah, I believe I do.” Molly nodded her head in affirmation laughing at the thought. “We are a rather pro-Harry household aren’t we? Bill finds him respectable and driven and his friendship with the goblins has only increased Harry’s standing with him. Charlie loves his daring and he bested a dragon no less at fourteen. Percy, well, we won’t mention his ideals. The twins love his disregard for the rules. I know that boy has something to do with their business, but I do not know exactly how much. Ron is his best friend. You know how they are. And Ginny, well, she has had a crush on him since she first heard his story when she was toddler.

“Meeting him in person, not to mention the events of her first year, only made her infatuation worse. I am afraid that she will never get over The-Boy-Who-Lived. Not an easy thing to do for a young woman. Arthur loves him like a son. All this do-to with the Ministry has only made Arthur more appreciative.”

“Enough of dodging the matter at hand,” Minerva redirected the conversation. “We are here to see if the treatment of Harry is as bad as he has said. What are your plans if it is?”

“I will curse them every way from Sunday and take Harry home where he belongs. What about you?”

“I plan to lecture the muggles and maybe use a little magic and help Harry move in with you. I am glad to see we are in agreement then.”

“After you, Minerva.”

“Thank you, Molly.” Minerva walked the rest of the way to the front door. Molly raised a hand to knock, but Minerva pulled it down raising her wand instead. She unlocked the door and entered the very organized house.

“Good thinking, Minerva. I would have banged on the door until someone opened it.”

“If you know what you want, go for it. I learned that from a Slytherin I dated many moons ago. Among other things...” Minerva stopped speaking and tried to regain her composure.

“Minerva?” Molly said barely able to control her own shock. “I would be very interested in hearing about that story.”

“I have said too much, Molly. Now, it appears that everyone is asleep. We should go find Harry in case he wakes up from us moving around. His actions during the last two meetings tell me that he will act first then figure things out later. Let us check upstairs...” Minerva swept her arm up the stairs but drifted off when she spotted the cupboard under the stairs with a bolt on it. “Is that *the* cupboard?”

“I believe so,” Molly offered. “The twins came and took him from here before Harry’s second year. They mentioned a cupboard.”

The two women opened the cupboard and found dust and cobwebs covering a broken cot. Boxes and other things cluttered up the small space. Initials could be seen carved into the wood on the far wall.

“Those bloody people!” Molly shouted. “How could they?”

“Shush,” Minerva said listening for sounds upstairs. “Harry has turned out to be who he is regardless of this. Remember that if you must.”

They closed the door to the cupboard and walked up the stairs. Minerva cast Silencing spells on every step before they used it and they made their way to the top floor. Minerva stopped and pointed to the cat flap on the door. “What is this doing here?”

"I believe they used to feed him through that one summer," Molly said sadly. She looked to the usually calm teacher and found her to be far from it.

"They used a cat door to feed Harry?" Minerva looked down the hall and scowled fiercely. "It might be best if I stayed away from the muggles, Molly."

"I won't do any better, Minerva," Molly said pointing to the row of locks on the outside of the door before them. "They lock him in. How can they do that to Harry, the poor thing? I will kill them, Minerva. I will do it and I don't care."

"We are getting too emotional about this," Minerva said calming herself again. "Harry is fine. At least we have an idea of what it was like for him. I understand so much more about him now than I did. Shall we talk to Harry now?"

"Yes, I want to hear all about this place and those people. We can hurt them later."

By agreement, the women turned the knob and pushed the door open. They were not prepared for the sight that met them. The messy tuft of hair was easily identifiable, but the brown hair was not. The sheets covered both of the people who were wrapped up in themselves in a very friendly manner.

"Mr. Potter," "Harry," was said at the same time by two different people.

Bright green eyes shot open and searched out two familiar shapes hovering above the bed. Thoughts raced through Harry's head, but only one vocalized.

"Fuck," Harry said as he grabbed for his glasses and placed them on his face bringing the room into sharp view. Immediately, he didn't know which way was better; blurry or in focus. "Uh, um, morning Professor, Mrs. Weasley. How are you doing today?"

"Harry!" Molly shrieked. "What are you doing?"

“Um, I was sleeping, but now I am not,” Harry offered lamely.

“Mr. Potter,” Minerva stated in her professor tone. “Who is that in bed with you?”

“Um, well, I am not sure I should tell you.” Harry looked through the curtain of hair and found Tonks’ eyes shining up at him. She smirked and slowly brought her hand up and brushed the hair away from her face. She smiled meekly at the two women standing over them.

“Who are you?” Molly demanded pointing her wand at Tonks.

Minerva inhaled from shock. “Nymphadora Tonks! Explain yourself!”

“Nymphadora...” Molly said trying to put everything together.

Tonks shifted back to her normal self and smiled up at them again. “Wotcher.”

“Tonks!” Shrieked Molly again. “What in the bloody hell is going on here?”

“Tonks, you haven’t grown up one bit have you?” Minerva said in her teacher and authoritative voice.

“Hi Molly,” Tonks said brightly. “No, Professor, I haven’t and I don’t think I ever will,” she said to Minerva.

“Get out of that bed this instant young lady,” Molly yelled.

“Um, well,” Harry fumbled. “If you would give us a few minutes, alone, we will speak to you then.”

“Why on earth would you need a few minutes?” Molly yelled again.

“Because,” Minerva said blushing, pointing at the floor, desk, and Hedwig’s cage. “Their clothes are scattered around the room.”

Molly looked around the room and saw all the various articles of clothing. She saw the owl cage and didn’t know what to say about the bra lying across the perch. She saw Hedwig sitting on the back of the desk chair. Hedwig hooted at Molly and gave Harry an evil look.

"Sorry, girl, but you know, things happened and..." Tonks burst into laughter forcing everyone to look at her.

"You are in so much trouble, Harry," Tonks said between laughs.

"Yes he is," Molly yelled again.

"Not from you, but from Hedwig. He is so whipped it is laughable." Hedwig hooted again and turned her gaze to Tonks shutting her up quickly.

"I am not the only one, Nymph," Harry said smirking. "You realized that she owns both of us, right?"

"Well, it could be worse," Tonks admitted looking into Harry's eyes.

Clearing her throat, Minerva spoke up. "It could be worse?"

"It could be, I guess," Tonks relented, "But I am not sure how much worse it could be. Either way, if you could give us a few minutes to get dressed we can talk things over then."

Molly looked over the pair and saw Harry holding Tonks tightly as if protecting her. Tonks smiled up at her and winked. "You said you found a man?"

"I did," Tonks answered. "It just happens to be Harry. Now, unless you want a full view of us, you might want to leave the room."

"We will be waiting downstairs for our discussion," Minerva said efficiently. She guided a confused and shocked Molly out of the room and down the stairs.

"Well, not exactly how I wanted people to find out about us," Harry stated. "Not the people I wanted to find us either especially not like this."

"But it was funny," Tonks mumbled as she kissed Harry deeply. When they broke the kiss, they started getting dressed.

"Funny or not..." Harry began as the door burst open to reveal a fuming Vernon Dursley.

"What is all the blasted racket," he stopped speaking when he saw Tonks slipping on her shirt. "I knew it. You and your bloody whore." He grabbed Harry by the shoulders and threw him out of the room and into the hallway wall. Harry crumpled to the ground, hard, as Vernon made to grab Tonks.

The noise had caused Minerva and Molly to race back up the stairs. They saw Harry slowly getting to his feet and could hear noise from Harry's room. Things were getting broken and grunts could be heard.

Tonks jumped out of the room and ran to stand next to Harry. "If you touch him, I will kill you!"

"Where is your stick, bitch?" Vernon roared as he emerged in the doorway wielding the leg to the desk chair. "No stick, no magic. I know that."

"You know nothing, Uncle!" Harry yelled from the floor. He got to his feet and saw Tonks had a cut on her arm. "You're bleeding!"

"I will do more than that, Boy!" Vernon said advancing on Harry with fury on his face.

Harry's mood darkened and he felt his hate well up inside of him. Tonks had been hurt and it was going to happen again. He waved his hand and Vernon's leg shattered with an echoing crunch. The vicious man fell to the ground instantly screaming in pain.

"Look, Uncle, no wand," Harry said venomously as he stalked towards his uncle. Harry Summoned his and Tonks' wands from the room. He gave Tonks hers and put his in the waist band of his pants since he never had a chance to put on his shirt. "Give me one reason not to kill you."

"Fucking, worthless, brat," Vernon shouted between his grunts of pain.

"Wrong answer," Harry shouted and kicked Vernon in the chest. "I warned you never to insult Tonks again. It goes without saying that

you were never to touch her.” Harry pulled his wand in a blur and leveled it at his uncle. “Avada...”

“Harry,” Tonks said calmly placing her hand on his right arm. “Please do not kill him for me. If you are going to kill him, do it for you and what he has done to you all these years?”

Harry stopped the incantation. A sickly green light remained twisting on his wand waiting for the final word. “You owe your life to Tonks, Vernon. I wanted to kill you. She saved you. Never forget that.” Harry took a deep breath. “We are leaving, Tonks.”

Harry looked at Vernon closely. He fired a Stunner at Vernon with all the strength and magic he could. The hallway was bathed in a red glow nearly blinding those in it. “Should last a few hours.”

Minerva and Molly stood at the top of the steps completely dumbfounded. In the last ten minutes, they had seen Harry in bed with Tonks, heard him thrown into the wall by his uncle, saw him cast wandless magic, nearly kill said uncle, and they felt the strength of Harry’s spells pass over them. Their wands hung limply by their sides in shock.

Turning to Petunia, Harry told her simply what was going to happen. “His leg is shattered and he will be unconscious for awhile. I wish him a very dreadful existence. I wish you goodbye; no more, no less. We are leaving as soon as we get our stuff collected. You had better hope the wards will protect you after I leave or the Death Eaters will torture you, badly, before they ultimately kill you.”

Harry pointed his wand at Vernon’s body and swept it down the hall in one fluid motion tossing the man down the hall and out of his way. “Nymph, let’s pack up. We are leaving.”

“Got it, Harry.” Tonks gave Petunia a sharp look before reentering Harry’s room and started gathering their things. She directed all of their clothes into her work trunk and put the other items into Harry’s. His normal trunk was full of the things he never unpacked from school leaving little room for new things. Molly and Minerva looked into the room but did not enter. They watched as Harry moved about the room gathering up his belongings using magic without hesitation.

When he pulled up the loose floorboard, the women knew that he had always been a prisoner at Privet Drive. Harry carefully placed the items filling the limited room in his school trunk and scanning the room once, then twice, before gathering up Hedwig in her cage.

“We are leaving, girl. No more Dursleys to put up with anymore. You can go where you want and do what you want now. Would you like that?”

Hedwig gave a hoot in agreement. Tonks closed the trunks and shrunk them before placing them in their respective cloaks. She looked for anything that had been overlooked. She cast Summoning charms checking for any forgotten items that were important. She reversed the charm on the bed shrinking it back to its normal broken down state and laughing as the parts of the destroyed chair fell to the floor. She turned and pushed past Minerva and Molly walking down the stairs and spreading their things out in the living room.

Harry gave the room one last passing glance and turned to leave. He stopped when he saw the expressions on the women’s faces. “You are new to this, but this is how my life has been since I can remember. I knew it would come to this, but no one ever listened. Tonks and I have been prepared to leave here since the first week. Now, if you will make it the living room, we can all talk a bit before we leave.”

Listening to the direct words Harry gave, Minerva and Molly walked down the stairs still in a state of shock. Harry gave Petunia one last pathetic look before turning away in disgust.

Once all magical people were in the living room, Harry sighed and stretched. Cracks could be heard from his back and neck. “And I woke up in such a good mood, too,” Harry said absentmindedly. “Well, you didn’t come here for the show.”

Minerva watched Tonks move through the remaining items she had laid out. Slowly, everything was disappearing into one of the trunks. “I am not sure where to start, Harry,” she said confused.

“I like the beginning,” Harry offered. “How about you start there.”

“Well, we came to see if things were as bad as you made them out to be last night. Obviously, it is worse.”

“We have our good days and our bad days,” Harry said offhandedly.

“And which was this, Harry, dear?” Molly asked.

“It was the last day,” Harry said firmly. “I am out of here. I will not stay. You saw what happened and almost happened.”

“You are going to be expelled, Harry,” Molly cried with worry.

“Nope,” Harry answered her concerns. “The only people who know what happened are in this house. If you say nothing, no one else will find out.”

“Harry,” Minerva started, “it doesn’t work like that.”

“Yes, actually, it does,” Harry said evenly. “If you can’t keep it quiet, we will be forced to Memory Charm you.” Harry drew his wand as did Tonks who had stopped her previous actions. Both women found themselves at the business end of friendly wands which were not so friendly at that moment.

“Harry?” Molly didn’t know what to do. “This is not you. Are you under a spell or something?”

“Imperius doesn’t work on me, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry looked to both women. “I want your word, magically binding, that you will not speak of what happened here to anyone.”

“If we refuse,” Minerva tested.

“We wipe your memories,” Harry left no room for debate. “Your choice, but I will tell you that I haven’t practiced the spell before. I might stuff it up and that would bother me since I like both of you.”

“I can do it, Harry,” Tonks offered without a hint of remorse.

“Tonks?” Molly pleaded. “What have you done to Harry?”

"I did nothing but treat him as an equal which is less than he deserves and more than anyone else has ever done. He is taking control of his life and we just have to accept that. If I can help him, I will. You came here because you care about him. I was here because I care about him too."

"You did more than care, Tonks," Molly accused. "You are too old for him."

"Six years or so isn't that much," Tonks defended herself. "I am here because Harry wants me here. If he wants me to leave, then I will."

"I want Nymph here, well not here," Harry said waving his wand around the room. "But here with me. I like her and she makes me feel good. I enjoy being with her and she has helped me this summer. Above all, she has been honest with me and right now that means a lot to me. Now, your word or Tonks charms you both."

"I accept," Minerva said shocking Molly at how fast she relented to being forced into the arrangement. "I swear, with all my magic, that I will not speak of today's events with anyone who does not already know about them." A small shimmer appeared around the firm woman as she finished her words.

"Molly," Tonks prompted.

Not sure what other option she had, she recited the same words. Harry and Tonks stored their wands away once everyone seemed to be agreed. Harry stepped forward and hugged Molly tightly. Once done, he gave Minerva a more formal hug. "Now, what questions did you have?"

"How long have you and Tonks been, intimate?" Molly asked haltingly.

"Since the beginning of summer," Harry said without hesitation. "She has helped me a lot. As you could tell upstairs, I can get a little protective of her."

"Harry," Minerva looked to Tonks and back to Harry. "What spells did you use on your uncle and how did you do it without your wand?"

“Ever efficient,” Harry said to himself out loud. “I used the Bone Exploding charm and a Stunner. I seem to have a knack for wandless casting. We discovered that this summer too.” Harry smiled at Tonks who returned it warmly.

“How is the Ministry not going to find out?” Minerva continued.

“Can’t answer that, sorry Professor,” Harry honestly looked remorseful.

“Where are you going to go, dear?” Molly asked eager and hopeful.

“I am sorry, but not to the Burrow,” Harry frowned sadly. “I don’t want you in danger like that. I would love to, but with the Death Eaters and Voldemort out there I can’t risk it.”

“Where will you go then?” Molly was becoming hysterical.

“To somewhere I should have gone to years ago. I just found out about it and I can’t wait to see it. Now we must really be getting along.” Harry stood up from the trunk he had sat on and helped Tonks up as well. He looked into her eyes and found acceptance and affection. He leaned forward and kissed her quickly. “Thank you, Nymph.”

“My pleasure, Harry.” She smiled and winked at Minerva and Molly earning her two reproachful stares. Harry fished out his portkey ring and held it out for Tonks to grab onto. He reached out to grab onto Hedwig’s cage.

“This won’t be fun, girl, but please just trust me.” Hedwig gave him a questioning look but puffed out her feathers in defiance of anything bad that could happen. “I will take that as I am ready then.”

“Harry, is that a portkey?” Minerva asked.

“Yep.”

“The Ministry.”

“Has more important things to worry about right now than one portkey being used. I wouldn’t worry about it if I was you. I will be at the Order meetings and all of that. The only thing changing is my home address. Cheers.”

Tonks smiled and grabbed onto the ring taking them and their belongings away from the Dursley’s living room.

“Your address along with your entire attitude, Mr. Potter,” Minerva said the empty space in front of her.

“What just happened, Minerva?”

“Molly, we were just forced into an agreement with Harry Potter aided by Nymphadora Tonks. If this is what Harry is going to be like, I doubt the Magical world is ready for it. I know that Albus surely isn’t.”

“What can we do?”

“Nothing I can think of. Harry made sure that what happened here would not be spread by us. I only hope he knows what he is doing.”

“He was going to kill his uncle, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, he was.” Minerva answered. “He isn’t the same frightened little boy who didn’t know the first thing about magic.”

“He didn’t even know how to get to the train,” Molly reminisced. “I wanted to take him home with me right then and there and teach him everything he missed out on. He was such a sweet boy. He did hug us before he left. He has never initiated hugs before.”

“That would be Tonks’ influence. She is much more forward with things like that. This morning was such a flashback to her school days.”

“What do you mean?”

“Tonks is not unfamiliar to being caught in someone’s bed. I had caught her a few times while she was in school.”

“That hussy is with Harry?”

“Molly, Tonks had a rough time growing up. Her abilities made it nearly impossible for her to find someone who truly cared about her. That fact that she was her real self proves that she cares about Harry more than she let on. Playful as she is, I believe she really cares about him.”

“She had better not hurt him or I will hunt her down, mark my words,” Molly said vehemently.

Minerva thought seriously about the situation before answering Molly threat. “I think they are good for each other.” She felt Molly’s eyes bore into her head. “Both want to be loved for who they are, not what they are. One acts younger than she is and the other acts older than he is. Together, they might be able to be who they really are and find acceptance.”

“I accept them just fine.”

“Yes, but one level of acceptance is beyond your ability to offer. They seem to have no problem with that one considering the state of his room when we walked in.”

The tension slipping away for a moment, Molly laughed at the picture in her head. Clothes everywhere, even in the owl cage. “What about the nasty muggle upstairs?” Molly’s grip on her wand tightened in anger.

Minerva looked at the ceiling and sighed before answering. “He made his bed, let him lie in it.”

Molly nodded and smiled. “Care for some tea? Ginny and Ron won’t be up for a few more hours.”

“Excellent suggestion, Molly. After you.”

They left the house and never looked back.

Harry and Tonks arrived on a single lane, dirt path. In the distance, a stone and wrought iron gate could be seen. Trees lined the path on

both sides providing a very picturesque scene. The wind blew gently and the leaves in the trees rustled slightly.

“Harry,” Tonks said nervously. “I have to, a, I have to go, somewhere, not here, somewhere else, now. Right now.”

“Nymph,” Harry yelled as he jumped towards and grabbed onto Tonks’ arm. “Nymph, it is okay. Just hold on to me. Don’t let go. There is a Repelling charm on the area surrounding the property. That is why you feel the urge to leave.”

“It is more than an urge, Harry,” Tonks said clearly distressed. “I feel better, but I still don’t want to be here.”

“I think it will get worse before it gets better. Just hold on to my hand until I figure out how to protect you from the ward. My dad’s letter mentioned that there should be a journal on it inside the house.”

“What house, Harry?” Tonks’ distress seemed to remain constant, but she was visibly weakening every minute.

“Let’s get you inside the grounds at least.” Harry led the way after giving Tonks Hedwig’s cage and levitating their stuff ahead of them. They walked, or in Tonks’ case, was dragged up the lane. Reaching the gate, Harry reached out and touched the metal lock. With a shimmer, the gate opened revealing lush grounds and a worn cobblestone road.

Harry followed the road to a roundabout nestled in front of an elegant home. In the center of the roundabout was a fountain with water shooting out of a griffin’s mouth. Harry stopped walking and stood in place. He felt odd, not confused but settled. Something seemed right, but he didn’t know what it was. All he could think was that he was, home. He felt like he was home.

“I am home.” Harry wore a lost look about his face as he stared in wonder. A faint smile grew to replace the lost appearance. “I am home. I don’t know how, but I am home.”

The house seemed to be a collection of various pieces added on to each other over time. The dominant feature of the manor was a stone

tower that stood at least five levels above the ground. The battlements atop the tower had a worn but well-kept look about them. Closer to the ground and on the left side of the structure was a slightly aged, modest, two story addition composed of stone and timber. While the tower looked to be at least nine hundred years old, the addition couldn't be more than four hundred years old.

On the right side of the tower, a much newer addition had been added. To an untrained eye, it couldn't have been older than a hundred years, but it matched the other pieces very well while giving the entire structure an overall updated look. Off of the newest addition, Harry saw a row of garage doors slightly hidden by a copse of bushes. The main entrance was in the newest addition and Harry started walking towards it leaving their belongings behind and dragging Tonks and Hedwig forward.

Advancing on the home, Harry could see a pair of solid oak doors with iron accents blocked entrance to the home. On either side of the doorway hung aged and blackened oil lamps. Above the doors was a magnificent timbered arch with the words, "*Potter Estate*" carved ornately into the wood. Harry rounded the sputtering fountain dragging Tonks behind him with an irritated Hedwig bouncing along in her cage. Harry was pulled by an unseen force to the building. He couldn't think of anything but getting into the house.

A screech from nearby echoed across the grounds reverberating off some old-growth trees on the southern edge of the property. Harry stopped suddenly at the noise leaving Tonks to run into him and Hedwig made an unhappy sound from being knocked into the side of the cage. Harry looked in the direction the sound came from to find a massive griffin running towards them. Harry put himself between the animal and Tonks. He drew his wand and readied for an attack.

"Tonks, is that Vincent?" Harry asked nearly panicking.

"I don't think so. Vincent is smaller isn't he?"

The griffin ran right up to Harry and stopped right before running him over. The creature screeched again hurting Harry's ears. He didn't know what to do so he waited with a shield spell on his lips and another in his mind. The massive animal clawed at the ground

viciously sending sod and dirt flying behind it. It sounded again and Harry could swear that the glass in the windows above him rattled.

Harry and Tonks slowly retreated from the doorway backing away from the clearly irritated creature. The main doors opened and a house elf scurried out of them. The elf wore a neatly pressed, plain dark grey dress. The elf looked well fed and very sure of itself as it advanced on the griffin which towered over it.

"What you making noises for, Jules?" Snapped the elf. "Stupid griffin yelling 'bout everything. You lucky the funny muggles can't...hear...you..." The elf drifted off as she turned to see Harry holding his wand at the ready and Tonks fighting both herself and Harry to escape. "Master James?" the elf asked but stopped almost as soon as the words left her hopeful lips. "Master Harry!" The elf screamed and ran to Harry almost knocking him over when she impacted his legs.

The elf began to weep and held on to Harry's legs as tightly as she could mumbling about Master's Harry and James and Mistress Lily. Harry would have laughed had the griffin not followed the elf and been staring him down at that very second.

"Um," Harry said not sure how to address the blubbering elf, "this is great and all, but the griffin looks like it wants to kill me. Could you, um, fix that, please?"

The elf looked up at Harry and gave a watery smile. "Master Harry is as nice as Mistress Lily always was." She turned to the griffin but didn't let go of Harry. "Jules, be nice. This is Master Harry. You stop making noises." The elf turned back to Harry and held on to him again.

Jules looked at the elf and back up at Harry. She sniffed at Harry a few times with each time getting more forceful. After a series of sniffs, the griffin visibly relaxed and lowered to the grass. It nudged Harry with its beak seeking some attention. Harry did the only thing he could and petted it as he had done with Vincent.

"How many griffins do we have?" Harry asked under his breath.

"We is having two griffins, Master Harry," the excited elf announced loudly. "Vincent is watching the chamber and Jules is watching here. I is so happy you is returning Master Harry. I is being so lonely with only Jules and Paul to talk to. They is not very talking. Mistress Lily loved to talk."

"I don't mean to be rude, but my friend is not keyed into the wards so she is having a terrible time. Do you think you could get me the journal on the house, please?"

Tonks still fought against the wards and Harry had a nasty bruise forming from her ever-tightening grip. Jules seemed somewhat pacified from Harry's attention and had settled near the front door blocking entrance to the home. The elf looked up at Harry and smiled widely before letting go and snapping her fingers, disappearing from the grounds.

Harry turned to Tonks and helped her to a sitting position before she collapsed. Harry pulled her shivering body to him and held her tightly as she moaned slightly from the effects of the ward. The elf reappeared next to him bouncing on her feet holding out an old worn book. Harry grabbed it with his right hand and tipped it open. He quickly looked at each page as he flipped through them searching for the right one.

He found the necessary information about halfway through the book. He scanned the process needed and started saying the words while moving his wand over Tonks. Once he finished, Tonks stopped shaking badly and sort of drifted off to sleep in his arms. "Nymph?" Harry asked worriedly. He felt her head and shook her shoulders lightly.

"Your friend be fine in awhile, Master Harry," the elf said still jumping in place.

Harry kissed her head and stood up bringing Tonks with him. He lifted her into his arms and she snuggled into him. "Um, I don't know your name, but could you show me a comfortable place to put her."

"Yes, Master Harry," the elf said bowing low and sweeping her arm towards the open doors behind Jules. "Jules, you move for Master

Harry and his friend.” Jules stood slowly as Harry approached and sniffed him and Tonks before moving out of the way allowing entry.

The elf led them through the doorway and into a granite-tiled foyer. The stone shined from the light coming in the door and from the medieval looking chandelier hanging above them. A dark wooden staircase to their right ascended to the next level opening into an ornate hallway that disappeared from view as Harry continued to follow the elf.

She led them from the foyer through tall double doors into a deep room with a few couches and a massive fireplace that would be at home in Hogwarts. Harry carefully settled Tonks onto the softest looking couch. He laid her head on a fluffy pillow the elf brought to him at just the right time. Tonks’ head slowly sunk into the pillow and as she curled up slightly.

Harry pulled a folded blanket from the back of the couch and draped it over Tonks tucking her in with it. He smoothed it over her body and brushed the hair off of her normal face. The intimate gesture led Harry to kiss her lightly on the forehead before standing and looking at the elf waiting not-so patiently for him.

“Um, hi,” Harry said nervously. “I am Harry and please call me Harry. I am not fond of ‘*master*’ or any other formalities. Just Harry is fine.”

“Harry is so much like Mistress Lily,” the elf replied looking reminiscent. “Mistress wouldn’t let Tiki call her Mistress no matter how much Tiki asked to. Master James always laughed at Mistress and Tiki.”

“Okay, so you are Tiki?” Harry asked trying to get all the names correct.

“I is Tiki, Harry, sir.”

“No sirs, either. Just call me Harry. First off, how long will Nymph be like this?”

“Nymph will be asleep for an hour maybe more.”

“Alright, now if my mum wouldn’t let you call her Mistress before, why can you call her it now?”

“Mistress Lily never ordered Tiki not to call her Mistress after she died. I choose to call her Mistress now.”

Harry smiled sadly at the reverent mentioning of his mum. “I don’t remember her. Tiki, could you tell me about her, stories or really anything some time?”

“Tiki be happy to, Harry. What would Harry like to hear?”

“Right now,” Harry said sitting down in front of Tonks and rubbing her shoulder. “I would like to hear about this place and who Paul is.”

“Paul is First Elf. Paul served Master James’ father. Master James never took personal elf so Paul still First Elf. I Mistress Lily’s elf. I play with baby Harry when Mistress need time for things. Baby Harry like me.” Tiki smiled a wide smile at Harry as she told the story. “Paul and I stay here when Master and Mistress left. Tiki never saw Mistress again until after ‘it’ happen. Tiki cry for month. Paul never been same.”

Harry breathed deeply at those words. “What do you know about that night? I need to know.”

“Paul and Tiki know something bad happen. We feel when happen. We get to ‘hideaway’ and Dumblydore be there with big man. Dumblydore take baby Harry and give to big man. We not allowed to visit baby Harry. Tiki cry. Paul and Tiki bring Master and Mistress here and bury Master and Mistress. Tiki never cry so bad.”

“They are here?” Harry asked both hesitant and unable to contain himself. “Where did you bury them?”

“Master and Mistress bury in family grave. Grave in back near stables where Jules sleeps.”

Harry closed his eyes and took in deep breaths while he thought over the idea of visiting his parents’ graves. “Thank you for doing that,

Tiki.” Harry patted Tiki’s arm before looking at Tonks who still slept quietly.

As the morning continued until nearly lunchtime, Tiki told Harry about his parents and what life was like at Potter Estate. Harry learned that his first birthday party was a large affair involving many people at another location they used for events where non-family members would attend. Tiki had described an intense battle with baby Harry concerning accidental magic and the cake. By the end, the cake ultimately lost the fight and Tiki had to change her dress.

Harry found out that the Potter’s left the Estate to protect it from further probing by Voldemort and the Death Eaters. The Estate had been kept secret since the Middle Ages and James did not want to be the Potter to expose it. The cottage that was destroyed that fateful night had been used as a local presence in the nearby community. The Fidelius Charm had been an idea of Dumbledore’s to hide the Potters.

Tiki told Harry about the night she brought Lily back to Potter Estate for the last time. The poor elf had to pause multiple times to regain control of herself. Harry finally stopped the retelling by giving the elf a hug. Harry didn’t know why he had to hear the story, but he couldn’t force Tiki to relive the experience since it was so traumatizing for her.

As he consoled Tiki, Harry looked around the room finding sun shining through the windows lighting the hardwood floors and the painted ceiling. The dark red drapes nearly glowed from the sunlight and faint specs of dust floating in the air were illuminated as they slowly drifted to the floor. Regardless of the circumstances, Harry felt content and at peace with himself.

A tremor in the couch caused Harry to turn to Tonks who was staring up at him with her normal, brilliant eyes. “Nymph, this is Tiki. She was my mum’s assistant.”

Tonks smiled at Tiki, “My name is Tonks. Please do not call me Nymph or any other variation thereof. Only Harry gets to call me anything other than Tonks.”

“Mistress Tonks, Tiki will be happy to serve you as friend of Harry.”

“No Mistress, please, just Tonks.” Tonks changed her appearance to her usual spiky-haired auror look.

“Oh, Tonks can be different people?” Tiki squealed bouncing in front of the couch. “This most fun. Tiki not know people who do this.”

A gruff voice from the doorway broke the moment, “What you yelling about, Tiki?” An old and wrinkled elf pattered into the room. He wore a simple dark grey jacket buttoned once. When he saw Harry sitting on the couch, his eyes widened. “Master James?” The elf questioned but seemed to know that wasn’t correct.

“It Harry, Paul. Harry come back to us. Tiki so happy.”

“Master Harry, sir,” Paul said bowing low nearing touching his nose to the floor.

“It is just Harry, Paul, pleasure to meet you, again,” Harry said respectfully.

“Not him too,” Paul commented under his breath. “What does *Master* Harry wish of Paul?”

“It is just Harry, Paul. I am not your master. I am just Harry.”

“Master Harry, Paul has been through this with Mistress Lily. If Mistress Lily could not change Paul, how can you?” Paul looked determined but quite neutral at the same time.

“What did you call my father?”

“Master James.”

“Did he ask you not to call him Master?”

“Only when Mistress Lily was in room. When she leave, Master James would reverse the order.”

“Master James like making Mistress Lily mad at him,” Tiki added with a firm head nod.

"Sounds like something Ron and Hermione would do to get each other worked up," Harry said under his breath but Tonks heard him. "Well, I order you not to call me Master Harry. Harry is fine. Tiki has the same orders."

"And I am Tonks."

"Harry can order me to call him, Harry, but you can not, Mistress Tonks." Paul seemed very sure of himself when he informed them of his position.

"You are to call her Tonks, Paul," Harry provided the necessary authority. "Please follow her requests as you would mine. She will be staying here either way so let's find a way to make this work out, okay?"

"As you wish, Harry," Paul bowed in agreement.

Harry groaned quietly at the bow, but let it pass unmentioned. The older elf seemed to be much more set in his ways than Tiki. Harry watched Paul wonder around the room looking slightly lost and out of place. Harry could see similarities between Paul and Kreacher. After some small talk, Paul excused himself to return to his duties outside. Tiki explained that she took care of the house and Paul handled the grounds. Harry asked how things had been going over the years. Tiki informed him that with Paul getting older, they were at the near limit of their abilities keeping the Estate at a respectable level of cleanliness.

Harry told them he might know of another elf that could help out. Tiki was quite pleased to hear that until she noticed the dust floating in the air near the window. The last Harry saw of Tiki that morning was her running out of the newly cleaned living room yelling at the dust to go away.

Tonks pulled Harry into an embrace and kissed him deeply. "Well, you have a home now, Harry. What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to live in it, Nymph. I am going to simply live in it. This is where I was meant to live. I was supposed to stay here if anything had happened to them. I feel...I don't know, I feel at peace here. I

belong here. It is big and old and empty, but I belong here. Maybe that is why I liked Hogwarts so much at night. It is a lot like this place. It has the same feel to it.”

“I know what you mean, Harry. It has a great feel to it, but more than that, you haven’t stopped smiling since I woke up. That was a great nap I had. I never want to go through that ward again though. My bones ached from it. Now, what are the plans?”

“We should probably get the rest of your things before someone notices I am gone. Otherwise, they will stalk you until they find me. Do you know how to get back here now that you are keyed into the wards?”

“I think I know how to get back here now,” Tonks thought for a few minutes. Her hair changed from pink, to red, to purple, to black as she thought. “Yeah, I know how to get here again. It isn’t easy figuring it out though. Those wards make it nearly impossible to remember the location.”

“And you are permitted to know them too. I need to read the journal on them so I can figure them out before I leave. I can’t rely on a portkey to get here. I need to know the coordinates by heart so I can Apparate.”

“We can explore the house when I get back then?” Tonks asked.

“Definitely, Nymph.”

“Well, cheers then.” Tonks kissed Harry on the lips giving him a little tongue in the process before searching for her way to the front door.

A squeal and a crack let Harry know that Jules was still outside and waiting for visitors. He grabbed the book and went outside finding Jules patiently waiting for Tonks to return. A glint in his eyes told Harry it wasn’t going to be a pleasant meeting.

“Jules, you will be nice to Tonks. Do you understand?”

Jules looked up before trotting over to Harry and sniffing. Satisfied, she laid down behind Harry and in front of the door. Seeing a good

place to wait for Tonks to return, Harry sat down and used Jules as a backrest. Opening the book, Harry started to read about the Estate and the protective magic surrounding it. In minutes, Harry decided to focus on the basics and worry about the average stuff later.

“Another Hermione project I think.”

Tonks appeared in her flat and quickly moved to the bedroom gathering everything she could with a wave of her wand. The corner of the room quickly filled with clothes and other small belongings she planned to take with her. She hesitated over one of her drawers before deciding it was a good idea.

Ten minutes later, Tonks had her clothes shrunk and stuffed in a bag. She left the bedroom but heard a noise come from the living room. Setting the bag down quickly, Tonks tossed a spell into the room and moved to the far wall waiting for the intruder to reveal himself. A gruff laugh told her what she needed to know.

“Moody, what in the hell do you think you are doing?”

“Keeping tabs on you since that’s the best chance I have of finding Potter,” came the reply from a slowly materializing shape.

“Whatever do you mean?” Tonks asked moving to the kitchen to ensure that any food left around was disposed of.

“I know the boy isn’t at the house. Funny that I choose today to see if things are really as bad as he said and what do I find?”

“Not sure, what did you find?” Tonks noticed that Moody didn’t have his wand out so she knew that she had a chance to get away if she needed to.

“I found a rather large muggle, unconscious and with a shattered leg, another nearly hysterical muggle running around the house, and finally a really confused fat one blankly watching the telly trying to ignore everything else.”

“He is always blankly watching the telly, nothing new there.”

“Tonks, what did you do to the muggle? I had to revive him three times before he came around. Then, I had to Silence him to hear myself think. She was no help. I ask again, what did you do to the muggle?”

Tonks thought it over and decided it was safe to answer honestly. “I did nothing, Moody. Now, if you don’t mind, I have somewhere to be right now.” Tonks gathered her bag and dropped the picture from the hallway into it before closing it up.

“Where are you going, Tonks?”

“Like I said, somewhere.”

“Tonks,” Moody growled drawing his wand only to be met with another. “Where is Potter.”

“Harry is where he wants to be. He is where he should have been from the beginning. Now, I am invited to stay there with him and I am going to do just that one way or another.”

Moody sighed and lowered his wand. “Fiery and all determination. Just like when you started at the academy. Where is he, Tonks?”

“I will not tell you, and even if I could, I wouldn’t. You know, he will come looking for me if I don’t make it back soon.”

“And why would that scare me?”

“The backyard only worse,” Tonks hinted with a smirk. “If you thought that was bad, you haven’t seen anything yet. He is better than I am, Moody. You know I am no slouch, but compared to him, I am nothing.”

Moody sighed again. “That boy is going to cause so many problems for us.”

“He will only cause problems if you aren’t willing to work with him. He will not be controlled. You know as well as I do that he is not the type to be used and controlled. It isn’t his personality nor is it his way. If a

side must be chosen amongst the good, I will choose his. Do not make me chose sides.”

“We do not need factions fighting the Dark Lord. That will only make us weaker and easier to kill off. Where is he, Tonks? If for no other reason than to easy my mind.”

“Can’t say, Moody. You are not responsible for Harry. He is responsible for himself and anything else he wishes to be. Don’t make his life harder.”

Tonks stepped back and smiled sadly at Moody. “Harry is his own person, Alastor. Treat him that way and you will earn more of his respect. Don’t waste your time looking for him. Only one person has ever found a Potter when they didn’t want to be found and he had inside help. You won’t find inside help here.”

Tonks nodded a goodbye and Disapparated with a soft crack reappearing near the park on Privet Drive. Tonks moved a few feet away before Disapparating again and appearing near the Shrieking Shack. She went to other side of the structure before Disapparating again to Potter Estate.

Tonks planned to appear in the front yard, but felt a solid force push her outside of the grounds depositing her in the same place where the portkey took her and Harry to earlier in the day. She didn’t feel the same level of urging to leave the area, but Tonks still felt it faintly in the back of her mind.

Hurrying along Tonks moved up the path and came to the gate. She pushed on it and found that it opened slowly for her. Once inside the gate, the urging to leave lessened before disappearing. Tonks saw Jules sitting in front of the door along with Harry. Reaching Harry, Tonks smiled at him receiving the same in return.

Harry looked up to see Tonks standing over him holding a rather full looking bag. He smiled at her and stood up patting Jules on the head. “Nymph, did you feel the wards at all?”

“It forced me outside of the grounds and I felt the Repelling ward, but it was a lot less than before.”

“Good, that is how it is supposed to work according to the book. Since you don’t have Potter blood in you, you will always feel the ward outside of the property and you can’t Apparate inside the grounds. I gave up trying to figure out how they work and just tried to learn how to use them. I swear they are the most confusing things I have ever read.”

“Warding is a specialty most never grasp nor even try. I know little about them other than Anti-Apparition and Anti-Portkey wards. I only know those from the academy. Oh, speaking of, Moody knows you are gone. He was in my flat waiting to find out where you are. I told him I couldn’t tell him and I left.”

“How did he take it?”

“Better than I expected but not all that surprising. So, where do we start the tour?”

“Well, Nymph, how about the first floor and we work our way up from there?”

“Excellent, lead the way, Master Harry.”

“Nymphadora,” Harry said warningly. “Your cheek will only get you into trouble. I might let Jules have a go at you if you continue to be unpleasant.”

Tonks smirked and on her tiptoes pulled Harry’s head down to her level. “I would rather you have a go at me, Harry. That sounds a lot more enjoyable to me.” Tonks grabbed his bum before she picked up her bag and started around Jules who remained lying on the ground.

“Minx!”

“No, Tonks, but I will forgive your mistake just this once.”

“Tease then,” Harry called after her before catching up and twirling her around in the air. “You may get what you want if you aren’t careful.”

“Threat or a promise, Harry,” Tonks looked hungrily into Harry’s eyes.

“Both,” Harry replied slowly knowing he was making a deal with a she-devil. He wasn’t disappointed by Tonks’ reaction to his words. She smirked and licked her lips before walking into the house swaying her bum most noticeably. “I am in trouble.”

The tour revealed the living room and foyer they had already seen. The ornate dining hall, immediately off the living room, shimmered from all the crystal glassware and golden plates and goblets set about the long table. Harry counted twenty places arranged on the table which could have been expanded to hold another six people. The room was bright and overly clean compared to what Harry had come to expect from similar Hogwarts’ furnishings.

Next, they found the kitchen which looked to be a miniature version of Hogwarts’ kitchen. Tiki found them “messing about” the kitchen and quickly ushered them back into the hallway as nicely as she could. Tonks laughed as Harry tried to explain that they were just looking around, but the elf refused to believe it. She kept saying that James and Sirius always said the same things right before something exploded or a disaster occurred.

Tonks took pity on Harry and led him away from the kitchen and found a stairwell leading to the basement. They followed it down the circular stone steps and came to a wine cellar that had to have at least a couple thousand bottles of wine and other liquor. They found a storage room filled with numerous things that Harry didn’t bother to explore.

Back on the main level next to the cellar door, Harry opened a door that opened into a long garage filled with classic to newer automobiles. Harry walked down the line of autos reading and recognizing the names. Aston Martin was the label on most of the autos varying in styles and ages. Harry recognized one of the designs as something he had seen on the telly one night when the Dursleys were too busy to shoo him away.

Leaving the garage, Harry and Tonks found loo that looked rather updated. Modern fixtures and plumbing proved that the home was anything but outdated. Harry never really noticed as they moved from the old parts to the newer ones. Everything seemed put together

seamlessly. Ascending the stairs, Harry looked ahead to the elegant hallway extending past several rooms and turning left into another area of the home.

The first set of doors opened into bedrooms of normal size and décor. As they reached the end of the hallway, Harry saw three rooms with much fancier doors to them. The first one led to a nursery decorated with Quidditch scenes on the walls and various Quidditch-themed items around the room. Harry sat down heavily on an ancient rocking chair next to a crib. The crib was made and awaited a baby to be laid in it.

Harry took a few deep breaths as he took in everything. He saw a few stuffed animals arranged in the crib. A black dog, a wolf, a stag, and a rat were in each corner waiting for someone to play with them. With a shaky hand, Harry pulled the stag out of the bed and held it carefully in his hands. One of the antlers had been chewed on and it looked frayed. The fur appeared to be matted in places and the tail looked to be about ready to fall off.

A comforting hand found its way to Harry's shoulder and a warm body pressed against his side. "I think you did that, Harry. I can just see you chewing on it. Go on, give it a try." Tonks was playfully while giving Harry support as he assimilated what was very obviously his room before they left.

Harry cradled the stag in his left arm as he touched each of the other animals in turn. The rat got the least amount of time while the dog got the most second only to the stag. Under the pillow, Harry found a griffin which looked a lot like Jules and matched her coloring perfectly.

"Mistress Lily like stuffed Jules best," said Tiki from the doorway. "Mistress always try to get baby Harry to play with it most, but stuffed James always win. Mistress never give up."

"Tiki, have you kept this room as it was then?" Harry asked.

"Tiki keep baby Harry room same. Paul never come here."

Harry let a small tear slide down his cheek as he hugged the stag tightly. He picked up the griffin and held it for a bit before giving it to Tonks to hold on to. "Present to you, Nymph. Keep it please."

"Harry, this is yours. I can't keep it." Harry met her eyes and she relented instantly. "Whenever you want it back, just ask."

They left the room closing the door softly. They shared a hug in the hallway before opening the door across the way and founding a large bedroom with a massive four poster bed. The rest of the room gave off an aura of sophistication and elegance.

"Master and Mistress Potter's room," Tiki said. "I never meet Master and Mistress, but Paul miss Master and Mistress. Paul stay here at night in closet. He want to be close to Master and Mistress."

"I thought my dad dying caused Paul to become like he is."

"Master James make Paul more bad."

"Harry, most elves only lose one or two masters during their life," Tonks said saving Tiki from describing the situation. "Paul has lost about four so far. I doubt he knows what to do right now."

"I see Kreacher when I look at him," Harry said.

"That demented painting made Kreacher as bad as he was, but he would have been worse than Paul. At least Paul was treated well."

"Can elves retire?"

"Paul no retire," Tiki said firmly.

"Well, can he do less around here? I mean, I think I could get another elf to help out and pick up the slack. Actually, I am sure he would jump at the chance to help out knowing him."

"Paul need some help, that all," Tiki explained.

"I will see if he can help us out then, Tiki. I only want to help Paul out before he really loses it."

The last door opened into the largest room on the floor. Vibrant Gryffindor colors dominated the room. The poster bed was as large as the previous in the other room, but it appeared more subdued. The furniture complimented the décor and the lighting made everything jump out. A walk in closet could be found next to a tall dresser. Tiki began moving the clothes into a pile using magic and her hands.

“What are you doing, Tiki?”

“I is making room ready for Harry and Tonks. Harry need room for things.”

Harry was cut off by Tonks hugging him. “You can’t leave everything the same, Harry. It isn’t going to make them come back. This is your place and the only way to make it truly yours is to live in it. Let Tiki do her thing. All the stuff can be moved into the other room.”

Harry accepted the idea Tonks offered. Returning the hug, Harry held Tonks tightly as he watched Tiki clean out all of the clothing in the room. When she finished, Harry told her where their clothes were. Harry and Tonks continued to search the room and found the attached bathroom to be even more modern than the downstairs one. By Harry’s count, the house had at least four bathrooms and he wasn’t done yet.

A door near the closet led to the nursery which Tonks explained in graphic detail. When she finished, Harry wasn’t sure how parents survived having kids. Thoughts of the number of sleepless nights the Weasleys went through nearly caused Harry to worry about their sanity after the twins. He doubted anyone would willingly risk having another child after having twins.

Tonks broke his thoughts by dragging him into the hallway again and following the left hand turn into a wide circular room with stairs curving up the far wall. Books lined the walls and Harry thought of Hermione running around barely able to contain herself. In the center of the room a couch and a collection of chairs sat with a few tables around them.

They took the stairs up and found a room that looked like a training room of sorts. Swords decorated the walls along with suits of armor,

shields, and other medieval relics. A few dragonhide cloaks hung from a rack waiting to be used. A diagram had been painted on the floor with numbers and lines.

Harry went to the next floor and saw a table with a model showing the Estate, the village, and the nearby area. Harry was intrigued and started poking at it with his wand. The model came to life and numerous dots appeared listing names. Harry could only think that it was the predecessor to the Marauder's Map. The dots moved and Harry wanted to know how to zoom in and out. Tonks found a thin book hidden in a drawer in the table.

After a few minutes of scanning, Tonks told Harry how to zoom in and out. Very soon, Harry was looking at the Estate grounds and building. He saw Jules still sitting in front of the door and Paul moving about the grounds disappearing from one place and reappearing in another. Tiki was moving around the master bedroom obviously putting clothes away. It also showed Harry and Tonks. Harry had a title of 'Lord' before his name leading him to look in the book for an answer as to why.

He found his answer near the back under *Labels and Identification*. It said that the last Potter heir always held the title of Lord as was custom from centuries ago. There was no way to change it no matter how much Harry wanted to. Tonks only laughed at his frustration earning her a vicious glare.

"Tough, Harry, sorry, Lord Potter if you will."

"Nymphadora, I swear, do not call me that..."

"Or what?" Tonks moved in front of him and pressed her chest to his. His anger lessened as she increased her body contact with him. "What will you do, Lord Potter?"

"This," Harry said as he picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder and smacked her bum. A squeal escaped her lips followed by a laugh. Harry bounced a few times before turning off the map and continuing up the stairs to the last level.

The room was empty except for a table near the far wall and a row of rather large cubby holes. Hedwig was settled in the largest spot with her head under her wing. Harry smiled at his sleeping friend before looking around the room. A ladder in the center led to the roof through a trapdoor in the ceiling. Harry kept turning around in circles taking in the view from the windows that lined the walls. He could see the entire grounds and a stream that seemed to run along one side of the property.

A tap on his bum reminded Harry that he had Tonks over his shoulder. "As much fun as this is, the turning is beginning to make me nauseous. Could you let me down and find another way to punish me please?"

Harry set Tonks on her own feet only to catch her when she teetered to the side. He held her up as she settled her stomach. "Let's avoid that in the future if we can. I am not sure if I could stop a repeat attempt."

"Is that the spinning or the over-the-shoulder bit?"

"The spinning around the room upside-down part, the over-the-shoulder part was fun actually. I see Hedwig found her home."

Hedwig moved slightly and cracked open one eye long enough to confirm who was in the room before returning to her slumber. Harry walked over and stroked her feathers lightly looking out the nearby window. The fact that it was his home, the whole thing, completely hit him at that moment. His smile grew as he watched the sun moving closer to the horizon in the west.

Tonks wrapped her arm around his back and curled into him. "What are you thinking?"

"It is all mine. It has been all mine for years. I have a home now. Whether or not it is empty, it's still mine. Up until now, everything that was mine could fit into a trunk with room to spare. I never had a place before. The Dursleys always made sure that I never got too comfortable in my cupboard. The room was hardly a place you would want to stay. Now, look at all this."

“It is yours, Harry. Yours to hide in, share with, or escape to.”

Harry finished looking out the windows and pulled Tonks to the stairs. He led her all the way to the foyer before saying anything. “I have to pick up the bike from the Dursleys and stop by Hogwarts. Tiki and Paul need help here and I think I can get them some. Do you want to come with?”

“Of course, Harry.” Tonks gave him a kiss and checked for her wand. “Ready when you are.”

Harry grabbed on to Tonks’ hand and Apparated back to Privet Drive long enough to grab his bike and portkey it back to the Estate. They found themselves in Hogsmeade standing behind Honeydukes. “Follow me, Nymph.”

Harry led her into Honeydukes and past an empty counter. He took her into the cellar and through the tunnel. Tonks never asked a single question, but she seemed close a few times as Harry maneuvered his way into Hogwarts and ended up in the third floor corridor.

“Harry, how many times have you done this?”

“Broke into Hogwarts? None that I can think of. Broke out of Hogwarts, a few times I guess. Some times just needed doing so I did them, like now. Come on, it is a ways to the kitchens from here.”

Harry followed the familiar path to the kitchen missing all the normal hang ups and problems that would commonly catch an inexperienced student. Tonks watched Harry move about the school with practiced ease. He tickled the pear, not missing a beat, and entered the kitchen finding a few elves moving about getting ready for dinner.

Once he was seen, many more elves appeared from places all over. Soon Harry had one hand full of cookies and the other carrying a basket of assorted food. Tonks had gratefully accepted a cuppa and found herself inundated by hopeful elves wishing to feed her.

“Um, thank you, all of you, but could I speak with Dobby please?”

One elf bowed and popped away only to be replaced by a blur of an elf who tackled Harry at the knees.

"Harry Potter, sir, yous is visiting poor Dobby and during the summer like Dobby did Harry Potter, sir."

"Yes, I am Dobby, but I have a question to ask you. Would you be willing to come to my house and help the other elves who are there? They need some help with us staying there now and I thought of you." Dobby grabbed his ears and his mouth dropped opened. "I can pay you if you are worried about that and you can have days off if you want..."

"Harry Potter, sir, wants Dobby to be his house elf? Dobby accepts without any pay and no days off. Dobby will be the bestest house elf Harry Potter has."

Harry watched Dobby nod causing his ears to flap like a bird trying to take off for the first time. "First thing, though, is you can call me Harry. No sirs, or Masters, or any other title. Just Harry is fine."

Dobby beamed at him before turning around and scurrying off into the depths of the kitchen. He returned carrying a basket with needles sticking out and yarn trailing behind him as he hurried to his new master. "Dobby is ready, Harry Pot... Harry."

"Good catch, Dobby. This is Tonks. She will be living with us. Treat her as you would me."

"Oh, you can treat me with less honour than you do Harry, thanks," Tonks added quickly seeing the elf bouncing on his feet. "I am just Tonks."

"No friend of Harry deserves less than full honours, Tonksie."

"Tonks, please only Tonks."

"Dobby will try, Tonks."

The return trip home almost ended prematurely. Dobby, not being used to sneaking around Hogwarts while following others, was almost

caught by a rather disgruntled Snape and nearly give away Harry and Tonks in the process. Harry thought Snape looked anxious about something and his mood seemed even darker than normal.

The greasy professor stalked down the hallway heading towards the entrance hall. Just as Snape rounded the corner, Harry thought he saw him grimace. Grabbing a nearly sobbing Dobby by the arm, Harry pulled the weepy elf along their escape path. Once they were out of ear shot of any of the castle inhabitants, Harry told Dobby not to worry about what almost happened. The constant assurances from Harry took them all the way to Honeydukes cellar.

Harry pulled out the portkey ring and directed it home. For the first time in his life, Harry could remember wanting to go somewhere other than Hogwarts and calling it home. Holding the enchanted item out, his companions grabbed on and they were deposited outside the grounds again. It took both Tonks and Harry to wrestle the poor elf onto the grounds as it seemed Dobby was more strongly affected by the wards than Tonks had been.

Once they were inside, Tiki helped hold Dobby down while Harry relieved him of the overpowering urge to flee. Within minutes, Dobby was bouncing like his old self awaiting orders from Harry. Tiki remembered that Harry hadn't eaten since he had gotten to Potter Estate leaving Dobby in a near fit until Tonks Summoned the basket of goodies the Hogwarts' elves had given them.

The dining room was used for a quick meal and Harry had told Tiki and Dobby to join them while they ate. Once the remains had been cleared, Tiki offered to show Dobby around the property after Tonks had spoken to her for a short time. Suspicious, Harry asked Tonks what was going on.

"What ever do you mean, Harry?"

"You are up to something and I think I deserve to know, Nymphadora."

"You do, do you? Well, I was wondering where I was going to sleep. It is quite late and we were woken up too early for my tastes."

“Um, I thought that...you know.”

“I do? What exactly do I know then?” Tonks queried with a cheeky smirk not unlike Hermione’s when she knew some that the others didn’t.

“Well, I guess since there are other rooms that you can pick one of them.”

“If that is what you want?”

“I,” Harry paused thinking of a way out of the situation he had been led into. “I want whatever you want, Nymph.”

“Let’s go up to your room then and figure it out. I know I don’t have that much stuff, but I think I might fit nicely in one of the other rooms. A girl needs her space you know.”

“Okay, if you are sure?” Harry was crushed. He had hoped that things would continue as they had been now that they had a place to themselves and the Dursleys were no where to be found.

Tonks led the way to Harry’s new room. She swished her rear incitingly as she ascended the stairs with Harry following. Once in the room, Harry closed the door as his mood clouded over dramatically considering his previous joy. Tonks went into the bathroom and began making some noise by moving her things around.

Harry went into the closet and began gathering her shirts and piling them up in a chair near the door. Numbly, Harry moved back and forth between the two locations. A soft coo from behind him broke his depressed stupor. Harry turned around and dropped the collection of shirts he had been holding.

Tonks stood in the doorway to the bathroom wearing a sheer robe revealing a dull blue nightie underneath. Harry found that he couldn’t move nor could he talk. He managed only unintelligible sounds as Tonks advanced on his position seemingly unaware of her affect on him.

“Harry, what on earth are you doing? Tiki put those away for a reason. Why are you taking them out of the closet?” Tonks stared at him waiting for an answer while her hair shifted in color to match her nightie before changing back to her real color.

“Um, you wanted me to?” Harry muttered unsure of where to look as he was torn between her face and the rest of her body.

“I said no such thing,” Tonks said as she approached Harry. She swayed her hips slowly as she walked up to him. She let the tie on the sheer robe slip open causing it to flare out as she sauntered towards Harry. The robe barely clung to her naked shoulders when Tonks stopped before Harry and looked up at him. “I said no such thing, Harry Potter.”

Her voice softened as every word left her lips which glistened in the waning light of the evening. Harry felt himself screaming for breath as he realized that he had been holding it since her appearance. Discretely inhaling as deeply as possible, Harry smiled a crooked smile and shrugged. Tonks’ smirk became even more seductive as she read his actions.

She leaned closer to Harry and let out a breath. “Something you want to say Harry?”

Harry looked into her eyes and knew what she meant, because he had seen that look before. “I just wanted to thank you, Nymphadora. For everything.”

Tonks smiled again which allowed Harry an opening to place his hands on her shoulders. Raising her eyebrows led to Harry sliding the robe from its precarious position to the floor. Harry lightly rubbed her now completely bare shoulders as she spoke very low. “You had better do more than that, Harry.”

Unable to think and left with only action, Harry pulled Tonks to him and kissed her forcefully and passionately. Tonks responded by wrapping her arms around Harry and rubbing his back and anywhere else she could reach. Their kisses went from uncontrolled and wild to deliberate and focused. Harry lost his shirt as they moved to the bed. Harry quickly lost his pants as Tonks made quick work of them.

Reaching the bed, Tonks turned them around and pushed Harry backwards onto the bed. She promptly removed Harry's remaining clothing proving she had what it took to make him happy. Tonks smiled hungrily as she slowly slid her only piece of clothing to the floor. Standing before Harry in all her glory, Tonks slid her hands down her front starting at her neck and ending on her thighs.

"We aren't at Privet Drive any longer, Harry. I expect you to make good on your suggestions." Tonks moved forward and slid her legs along either side of Harry's. She hovered above his eager body planting kiss after kiss moving closer to his mouth.

A series of tongue battles later, Tonks began to move her breasts up and down Harry's chest. She teased him by hovering her mouth ever so close to him but never making contact. After he groaned for the third time, Tonks moved to kiss Harry with reckless abandon. She pressed her chest against him rubbing her erect nipples against his own.

As the minutes passed, Tonks wiggled her lower half higher and higher on Harry. An unwanted pause in the action brought Harry's mind back into control for a few seconds.

"Harry, Summon my wand please."

Harry did so without hesitation and only minimal concentration. Tonks took her wand from Harry's hand caressing it softly while doing so. She mumbled a few words and aimed her wand at her abdomen. Once she was finished, she tossed her wand over her head and began kissing Harry again with a renewed energy.

Harry did what anyone in the same position would do, anything he could. He touched her arms, legs, sides, breasts, neck, and even managed to venture between her legs for a few seconds before she grabbed his hands and held them at his sides.

Tonks pulled back and looked into Harry's eyes. He saw that her previous hunger had increased and her eyes were looking nearly as wild and eager as they did after she had achieved a climax.

"Nymphadora, what?"

“Hush,” Tonks said softly. “At least for now.”

Her coy smile shifted to one of determination. She kissed Harry again and didn't let up. She released his hands and they went directly to her back. He held her to him and rubbed her back slowly as he focused on the kisses. Tonks took a deep breath and moved down on Harry.

To his surprise, Tonks had taken one of her hands and grabbed him firmly at the same time as she had moved down. His world stopped before restarting at a run. He felt fire and pleasure he hadn't experienced before. Tonks moved further down pausing every time Harry took a sharp breath. She gave him a few seconds to recover before continuing.

When he thought she would never stop, Tonks came to rest flush against his lower regions. Harry's hands had moved to her bum and held her in place preventing her from moving more than a few centimeters in any one direction. Trying to regain control of any part of his body, Harry focused on Tonks' half lidded eyes and the look of lust mixed with devilishness.

“Nymph?” Harry breathed out.

“From time to time, yes. Now is one of those times, Harry. Just enjoy it. I know I will.”

The pieces fell into place as Tonks broke free of his hold and started moving rhythmically on him. Harry felt his control waver badly before he captured Tonks eyes once more. He forced his way into her mind willing her to feel what he felt. He knew he had succeeded when Tonks bucked wildly and screamed out before returning to her previous rhythm.

Harry couldn't formulate a conscious thought so he concentrated on his breathing. Every breath in and out was deliberate as he tried valiantly to pace himself. His only problem was the beautiful woman determinedly trying to break his will. Harry soon realized that Tonks was going to win and that time was fast approaching.

Everything was hypersensitive as Harry matched Tonks' pace. He met her down motion with an up motion. The meeting forced a pant

out of Harry and a muffled squeal from Tonks. They continued like that until Harry felt the pressure in his body release in a burst of a wonderful feeling. With his coordination shot, Tonks went into overdrive throwing her body down on his as fast as she could. Her cries increased until she too lost control and collapsed on top of Harry.

He didn't want her move at all. He wanted her to stay right where she was. Her breathing even caused him too much stimulation. Harry did the only thing he could think of to hold her in place. He wrapped his arms around her and tightly held her to him. He kissed her forehead and whispered nothings to her. As his sensitivity lessened, Harry permitted her more range of motion but kept her well confined in his arms.

"Are you happy, Harry?" Tonks whispered into his chest.

"That was amazing, Nymphadora. Thank you."

"I have a little secret, Harry." Tonks moved bringing her mouth closer to his ear and causing him to grip her tightly to prevent her from moving too much. "There is much, much more where that came from. I can only hope that you will let me do that again, soon."

Harry had to stop himself from choking on his tongue when he processed what Tonks had said. Thinking fast and fighting the haze of pleasure, Harry responded. "Give me a few more minutes if you could."

Tonks answered by kissing Harry and rubbing her hands slowly around his chest. As the time progressed, so too did their actions. The elves spent the rest of the evening doing any chores that caused a lot of noise out of respect for their new master and mistress even if they refused to be called that.

Many miles away and a short distance north of London near the sea coast, a man groaned apparently from a large amount of pain. Those in the room cringed and shied away from the shuddering, cloaked form. Not a word was uttered, not a sound made by a living being.

The dim fire crackled being the only other source of noise in the long hall. The air was damp and pungent from the smoke that failed to travel up the flue which was in dire need of service.

The shuddering passed and dim red slits opened piercing the dark finding scared and leery followers awaiting punishment. Some deserved that punishment; others had not been complete failures in their roles. Those who had failed the worst were not among them. The snake-like eyes sought out a victim and rested on the quivering figure before him.

Clothing torn and slightly bloody the figure of a nearly teenaged girl began whimpering from the impending doom. The grim scowl changed to one of pure joy. He fed off of fear. Terror was his weapon. Power was his goal.

“Crucio.” The girl screamed and he found it to be better than the most perfect symphony. He held the curse as the screams increased and wavered and lessened, As the screams changed to failing wails, he relented and released the spell. As the skinny girl continued to whimper and shiver on the damp, stone floor, the most evil of all people casually waved his wand removing the top piece of clothing from the girl.

The clothes would only ruin the effect and an effect was what he needed. With a thought and a stab of his wand, the girl’s top half went erect as her lower half went limp. To an untrained observer, it would seem as if nothing was happening. At the first snap, it was apparent to all what the outcome would be. The second, third, and the near repetitive sounding of breaking ribs proved that terrible things were happening to the poor defenseless girl.

The snapping ended followed by a wet crunching and grinding sound. Once a small red slit appeared on her stomach, the final events happened quickly. The cut opened wide and fast as the insides erupted from within and showered outward covering the floor and those closest with bodily fluids and parts. The red slits for eyes were soon joined by a calm, toothy smile.

“Lord Voldemort has returned and all who fail me or stand between me and power will receive the same treatment.” The room was silent

as even the fire daren't interrupt. "Those who need to be dealt with will be dealt with soon enough. For now, Wormtail, clean that up. I will not have mudblood dirtying my chamber."

The rat-like man scurried over and began to magic away what was left of the body. "No Wormtail, no wand. Use your hands. Use your tongue if you must." The evil smile increased as Wormtail began a nervous attempt to return the expelled parts to the gaping hole in the broken body.

"Severus, you have not been as great a help as I had hoped."

Severus Snape controlled his mind as he moved before the Dark Lord ready to see his life end in a flash of green light. The last thought through his mind before the twisting red beam struck him was of how a scrawny boy with no overly apparent skill could stand before this creature and survive not once but several times. That thought was cut short as the burning hot knives found their way into every nerve ending in the Potion Master's body.

11. Votes And Defense

The world swam into a blurry picture as a bouncing elf shook Harry awake. The sound of Dobby's ears flapping against his head added to the limited humour of the moment so early in the morning. Harry shifted slightly feeling the pressure of another person resting on him. Looking down at the familiar brown hair caused Harry to remember the previous night.

Amorous thoughts dominated his mind as he quickly replayed what had happened. The heat from their bodies moving together was the first thing he thought of. The scent of their passion was not soon to be forgotten as Harry inhaled deeply catching a smell that only belonged to Tonks. *'My Nymph. She said that she was my Nymph.'* As he continued to reminisce, the person sharing his bed laughed softly.

"Harry, what are you thinking about?"

Harry looked at Tonks and found her smiling up at him in a very suggestive way. Not sure what she meant, he decided to play dumb. "What do you mean, Nymph? What makes you think I am thinking about anything?"

In response, Tonks grabbed a hold of Harry and squeezed earning her a slight moan from Harry. "I wonder."

Knowing he was caught, Harry gave in. "Well, I could tell you, but isn't it obvious?"

"I hope so, Harry." Tonks released Harry and moved to kiss him. After a few minutes, Harry managed to regain enough sense to remember they were not alone.

"Ah, Dobby, could you give us a few minutes."

"Make that a half hour Dobby," Tonks amended quickly.

"Dobby is most happy to leave since Harry and Tonks is happy."

With Dobby closing the door tightly behind him, Harry found himself pounced on by Tonks. Her hair tickled his nose as she kissed his lips,

cheeks, and neck. She slowly moved around until Harry felt the warmth of a pleasant spot descending on him. Further movement led to a much more real repeat of the night before than any of his previous thoughts.

Harry and Tonks left the bedroom at the same time, dressed in their cloaks, and went down for breakfast. They found two elves arguing over the cooker, pots, and table settings. Harry almost burst into laughter at the sight, but stopped himself when he realized they were serious.

"Uh, is there something I can help you with?" Harry asked being met with one irritated look and one hopeful.

"Yes, Harry, you can help Tiki. Tell Dobby that Tiki runs kitchen. Tiki serve food not Dobby." The little elf held her ground and put her arms on her hips while staring at Dobby's overly happy demeanor.

"Dobby only want to serve Harry. Dobby always serve Harry at Hogwarts. Other elves let Dobby serve Harry. Tiki not let Dobby serve Harry."

"That is cause Tiki serve Harry and Tonks. Tiki in charge of kitchen."

Sensing an impasse, Harry voiced his thoughts on the matter. "Tiki, how were things handled with my parents? There were the three of us and only two of you."

"Paul take care of Master James. Tiki take care of baby Harry and Mistress Lily."

"Well, how about you take care of Tonks and Dobby can take care of me. Will that work out for everyone? If you have a better idea, let me know." Harry looked to each elf and saw Dobby nearly falling over with excitement. Tiki seemed happier than before but she was no where near as happy as Dobby.

"Dobby love idea, Harry."

"If Harry want it, Tiki do it."

"I am only trying to avoid problems, Tiki. You are free to tell me what you think at any time you need to or want to."

"Tiki be happy to serve Tonks. Tiki be Tonks' elf?"

"I would rather us be friends but I only want you to be happy, Tiki."

"Tiki happy Harry return. Tiki miss Harry. Tiki like idea."

"Wonderful. We have limited time in the mornings, because we both have to be somewhere by eight."

The two elves said nothing as they leapt into action. Eggs were cracked and the bacon was frying before Harry found a seat next to Tonks. They both watched the elves working side by side as they cooked the breakfast. Harry felt a soft hand slide into his and he held on to it. He knew Tonks was looking at him, watching every move he made and it gave him a warm feeling inside.

"I am glad I am here, Nymph. Even with the minor problems," Harry motioned to Dobby and Tiki. "I love it here."

"I know you do," Tonks said quietly. "I saw you holding the stag when I got out of the shower. You looked at peace with yourself. You looked so calm holding it."

"I don't know what it is, but I feel calm holding it. I don't think about Voldemort or Sirius or even the Dursleys. I just feel content."

"Sure it wasn't the sex?"

"Well, it could have been that." Harry blushed slightly but smiled all the same. "That was brilliant. Thank you, Nymph."

"Play your cards right, and you might get more of it." Tonks put on her best seductive smile.

"Promises, promises, Nymphadora."

"Ones I aim to keep, mind you, as long as you don't become some great sod over night."

“What are the chances of that happening, Nymph?”

“Slim to none, Harry. It isn’t in your nature. You are going to be as honest and forthright as ever.”

“Now I sound like a sod. Thanks a lot, Nymph.”

“Oh hush, you.” Tonks leaned over and kissed Harry smartly on the lips. She followed that up with her tongue venturing around his mouth and teasing his own tongue. Harry responded as any teenaged male would, he let her do whatever she wanted.

A clearing throat interrupted the two before they managed to remove any clothing. Harry saw Tiki shaking her head and Dobby smiling brightly. “Just like Master James and Mistress Lily. Breakfast always worst.” Tiki set the plate of food in front of Tonks and shuffled away to begin cleaning.

Dobby set Harry’s plate in front of him and Harry had to stifle a laugh. All the food had been cut up in the same way Harry tended to do so at Hogwarts. “Uh, Dobby, did you cut up my food for me?”

“Dobby always want to, but other elves not let Dobby. They say Harry be embarrassed. Dobby can do what Dobby want now. Dobby so happy to be Harry’s elf.”

“Thank you, Dobby.” Dobby scurried away and started to help Tiki but quickly found a soapy rag deposited in his face for his trouble. Harry watched Tiki chase Dobby out of the kitchen raving that he had served Harry but cleaning wasn’t mentioned. “Touched in the head, both of them.” Harry murmured under his breath.

“Have you ever met a normal house elf, Harry?” Harry shook his head no. “Then it is you, Harry. You make them crazy. Most elves are formal, pleasant, and friendly. Yours are feisty, devoted beyond belief, and complete nutters.”

“Imagine that, something else not normal about me.”

Tonks shook her head sadly. "You are at the center of it all. Coincidence only goes so far, Harry. After awhile, you must accept that you are the cause of it all. You are so young too, sad really."

"Oh you are bad aren't you?"

"As if last night wasn't enough proof." Tonks smiled evilly at him and smirked. "I told you I am fairly flexible, but you didn't believe me, oh no sir."

"Well, I had never seen someone do that before. I didn't know it was possible."

"That and a lot more is possible, Harry. I will show you something new every day if I have to."

Harry choked slightly on his toast as his mind raced into action. His eyes grew in size until Tonks laughed at him. "We don't have time to take care of that, Harry. You will just have to wait until later I am afraid. Now, put that away so we can get to work. I am not sure what is going to happen this week."

"Nothing easy, I am sure."

"That is the spirit," Tonks said offhandedly. "Now, away we go."

Harry settled in the living room with Tonks and pulled the journal off the table. He flipped through it until he found the pages on Apparating. He scanned it a few times before drawing his wand and chanting a few things over Tonks before she felt a tingling and a gust of warm air. Something clicked in her head and she could clearly visualize where Potter Estate was and how to Apparate into it.

"Did that work?"

"I can Apparate here now, I know it."

"Wonderful. You can come and go by Apparition now. No more long walks up the lane and you can avoid Jules too. I think she likes you, in a bad way, for some reason."

"Jules last see Master James with Mistress Lily. They leave by lane. Jules not like witches with Masters since," Tiki chimed in as she was fluffing the cushions on the couch.

"Jules will just have to get used to Tonks. She isn't going anywhere as far as I can tell. Well, we are going to be gone most of the day. We should be back tonight. I hope you and Dobby can agree on things. I really don't want both of you to be fighting over things."

Tiki nodded and continued on about her work happily. Harry could have sworn that he heard her humming something.

They appeared in their team room and exited into the hallway heading for the training room. Once they entered they saw Cal speaking idly with Marcus. Horace was nearby but wasn't participating in the conversation.

"Ah, Ceps, just the man I needed to see," Marcus announced. "Please, could you and Chamel meet me in my office? I have something to request."

"Make it fast, Marcus," Horace barked. "I have plans for Ceps today. No more baby steps. Today, you walk like a man."

"Fucking wonderful," Harry murmured under his breath. "Just gets better, this."

Harry and Tonks followed Marcus back to his office and settled into the offered chairs. They saw a pile of folded papers sitting on the corner of his desk and Harry recognized his face among the headlines. He felt a slight chill rush through him as he watched Marcus settle into his own chair and steeple his fingers together.

"I was rather surprised to find you in my morning paper, Ceps. Quite the political operative you appear to be. Toppling Fudge with one article, impressive."

"He isn't out yet."

"You are correct, but let's see if you can finish what you started. I would like you to attend the recall vote at eleven. I have never liked

Fudge and he has been a hindrance since he came into office. This is the first real chance we have had to remove him and I can't see letting this opportunity pass. I spoke with Horace earlier and he agrees with me that you should be there in case anyone is swaying on their vote."

"I am not sure what you mean."

"Fudge has many allies and friends in the Ministry. Granted, they have distanced themselves from him in the last couple days, but these are people who go where the wind blows. I want you to turn on a fan for them." At Harry's raised eyebrows, Marcus leaned forward and answered his unspoken question. "I never said I was a pureblood. I know a few things about the muggle world. Remind these people why they are going to vote Fudge out."

"And," Harry asked hesitantly, "why are they voting him out?"

"Because you want them to. People love a winner. People follow the strong and determined. Just be strong and determined and everything else will work out." Marcus leaned back in his chair resuming his original position. "Walk into the room with all the confidence you take into your training here. You have surprised Horace many times in the last two weeks. I have a rather large supply of alcohol because of it. Surprise the fools upstairs too. Set your mind to it. You have never failed when you have done that have you?"

"No, he hasn't," Tonks answered for Harry while smiling at him. "He just needs the proper motivation sometimes."

Harry felt his face warm as he knew what Tonks was hinting at and that she was smirking at him as she spoke. "I will do what I can, Marcus. I still don't think me being there will change anyone's mind."

Marcus smiled as if he knew something Harry didn't and wished him well on the day's training. They left the room and reentered the training room. Horace snapped at them and directed them over to the classroom area that had been set up. On the board read one word and Harry knew he wasn't going to like the day's training at all. *'Imperio.'*

“The only Unforgivable you haven’t used. You can fight it off well enough, but you need to be able to use it. There is nothing like using your enemy to fight his own. While they are trying to figure out why their friend is killing them off, you are doing the same thing to them. It makes you twice as effective and there is less risk. Usually, you are further away than your victim, so they attack him first. If he dies, well that was the point in the first place, right?”

“As with anything, you have to want to control your target. You have to want complete and total control over them. Every movement, every thought must be at your command. As I learned with you, never expect success just because you cast the spell. It doesn’t always work. Now, we will start out small. I have a few animals over here that you will practice with. Then, we will move to a willing person and finally, we will finish with an unwilling person.”

Harry practiced the spell a few times on the spider Horace had provided. Harry managed to still the spider the first few times, but failed to cause any purposeful movement. With some ‘encouragement’, Horace directed Harry to dominate the creature. The total control over the poor spider left a very sick feeling inside of Harry. He could do anything he wanted to the spider or with the spider. His experimentation was quite limited much to Horace’s disappointment.

They moved on to a willing participant, Tonks. Tonks volunteered instantly when Horace mentioned that Harry would need to use the spell on a person who wouldn’t fight it off. Harry refused, outright, to cast the spell on Tonks. Only constant reassurances from Tonks allowed Harry to push down his honour and cast the spell.

As with the spider, the resistance was easy to break. Harry felt himself inside of Tonks, but only in a controlling way. He moved her arms and legs as he would his own only with more conscious thought required. Harry had her jump up and down a few times and spin in circles. Her normal clumsiness faded away as Harry tried very plain movements with Tonks.

“Most people love this part, Ceps. It is not often that people get complete control over someone else willingly. Where is the anger, the cruelty, the sadistic pleasure that people expose with this spell?”

“I wouldn’t want to do any of that to Chamel. I am not interested in dominating her like that. I have too much respect for her.”

“Idealist, go figure,” Horace grumbled. “Now, try it on an unwilling person, Ceps.”

“Who?”

“Me. Go.” Harry dove out of the way as Horace launched a spell at him nearly striking his left arm.

“Keep your appendages tight in to your body,” Horace instructed as he kept firing curses. “Anything flailing about can be cut off easily. Stay low, Ceps. If you go high, so does your center of balance. A simple Wind spell could knock you off balance and it is hard to counter those while moving around.” Harry tried to listen, but he was kept very busy avoiding the curses Horace continued to fire at him.

Becoming frustrated after a few minutes, Harry started casting the Imperius Curse at Horace. The second one hit, but Horace laughed it off. “This isn’t a Stunner, Ceps. You must focus the whole time. If you lose it at any point before you gain control, the spell fails. You have to overcome the resistance before you can relax. Again and make it count.”

Harry proceeded to cast the spell time and time again. The fifth try actually caused Horace to pause, but it didn’t last. The seventh time caused a longer pause, but Horace broke free in time to knock Harry back ten feet with a partially blocked Repelling Charm.

“Pathetic effort, Ceps. Maybe I should show you how it is done. Maybe Chamel could provide me with some entertainment until you figure out how to do this right.”

Horace watched Harry disappear from his location and didn’t know where he was until a spell struck him from behind. Harry had

Apparated behind Horace and hit him with a rather forceful Imperio, his strongest of the day.

Horace fought against the spell but found his internal voice extremely muffled. Harry's voice overwhelmed him and Horace couldn't help but obey the orders. He walked over to Tonks and asked her forgiveness for his comments. It was Harry who received the answer from Tonks. Harry released Horace from the spell once Tonks had accepted the apology.

"Not bad, but it took you long enough," Horace snapped. "If you can do the spells with that much intent, why not do it that way from the beginning. You gave me too many chances to kill you or hurt you. I could have killed your entire team before you decided to fight for real.

"We do not have the luxury of time, Ceps. Every second counts against us out there. If I am an enemy, beat me as fast as you can and as badly as you can. Why use two spells to beat someone when one will work. Do not make extra work for yourself. If I threaten your team, kill me and be done with it. If you need to capture me, capture me with everything you have. If you need control over me, get it. Sooner or later, you will figure this out. I only hope it doesn't cost someone their life first."

Harry looked to Cal then his gaze finally rested on Tonks' hopeful smile. He knew what Horace was saying was true. He saw the reason behind it. He recognized a Slytherin ideal and knew why they did so well in these kinds of settings. They always put themselves first and anything that got in their way needed to be overcome.

As Tonks' soft smile shifted to a more firm one showing her resolve to helping him, Harry nodded once to her and once to Horace. "I understand what you mean. I can't afford to hold back when I know what needs done. I will work on it."

"Good, now again." Horace fired another curse at Harry and watched him throw up both of his favorite shields, deflecting the spell, and returning it with Imperio. The calm warmth of the curse enveloped Horace before he could begin to fight the effects.

The last thought Horace had before Harry gained complete control was one word he had been waiting to use in reference to Harry, *'Finally.'*

Harry adjusted the color of his robes to a more stately crimson before he and Tonks Apparated outside of the Ministry. They popped into existence, one silently the other near silently, and advanced on the out-of-order phone booth. Harry had affixed a light but determined sneer on his face. Tonks remained as impassive as she could knowing that Harry Potter was stepping up today and she was going to have a front row seat for the show.

The lift lowered into the noisy din of the atrium. Harry's sneer became more of a smirk as he watched the colors of cloaks moving about. Many of the people were yelling and shaking their fists. Harry saw an organized group moving towards one of the lifts. He caught sight of a green bowler when the crowd was thrown back by a few Repelling Charms.

Harry strode purposefully forward from the lift knowing that he had to be wherever Fudge ended up. Tonks followed him closely and kept her wand out and at the ready. Harry pushed his way through the crowd as they continued to yell and shout about lies and deceptions. A few people caught sight of Harry and stilled as they watched him move to the guard stand completely focused on his goal.

One of the ten guards threw a hand in front of his face as he fought his way forward using his newly solid shoulders to leverage himself among the crowd. His penetrating green stare snapped to the face of the guard who had moved on to stop another over-anxious witch.

Harry stepped beyond the gold line marking the entrance to the guard station and earned himself three guards blocking his way. Tonks stood right behind him and kept her wand out as she exposed her auror badge. One of the guards waved her forward but tried to block Harry as she pushed him forward.

"Tonks can enter, but you can't, son," the guard stated formally.

"I am not your son," Harry said above the noise, "and I intend to see Fudge tossed out on his ear if he is so lucky."

The guard looked more closely at him and Harry could see recognition dawn on the guard. His eyes grew in size and his mouth opened slightly. Tonks placed her left hand on Harry's shoulder and urged him ahead. They parted the other two guards who seemed a little confused as the spokesperson of the three just backed up as Harry advanced.

"Thank you so much," Harry said in his most formal tone as he sidestepped the retreating guard. The pair of guards at the lift doors watched Harry and Tonks approach them without hesitation. They looked at each other, neither saying a word, and opened the doors.

Once Harry and Tonks started off for the proper floor, the guard on the left of the lift commented, "What does it matter? Fudge is out in an hour anyway. Hey you, get back in queue or you will be Stunned. I am only going to warn you..."

Harry took a deep breath as the lift gates opened to a slightly more organized chaos. Harry followed the same process as he had upstairs. Tonks directed him forward as Harry nudged who he needed to. They made it near the front where many of the press were bunched up and fighting for position. The aurors blocking the doors looked to be ready to pull their wands and put an end to the shouting people as their frustration was very clear.

"Finally, relief," one of them said loudly. "How many you got with you, Tonks?"

"I am not here to help you out, Ben. I am here to get Harry inside. So let's be a dear and budge over why don't you."

"Uh, what?" Ben asked looking at Harry and put meaning to her words. "Oh, shite as if it wasn't bad enough before," Ben said under his breath which only a few heard.

Sadly, a slightly redeemed Rite Skeeter managed to hear his words and sought out the cause. She found a very different Harry Potter standing even with her at the front of the line. Gone was the confused and timid boy she interviewed months prior.

"Harry Potter," Rita clearly vocalized.

“Not now, Rita,” Harry returned not even looking at her.

Never one to take no for an answer, Rita hipped a fellow ‘reporter’ out of the way to get closer to Harry. She began listing off questions as she started scribbling words down in her notebook. She only stopped when Tonks’ wand poked her in the chin. She looked down to find a very unpleasant expression on the auror’s face.

“Like I said, not now, Rita.” Harry stepped forward one step and the aurors blocking the door moved back a half step. “I wish to view the sacking today. If you would be so kind.”

One of the aurors saw the look in Harry’s eyes and didn’t really want to keep staring at it. He also caught sight of the visitor’s badge Harry wore. He nearly laughed as he read the words, ‘*Coup d’etat.*’ He unlocked the door and cracked it open enough for a person to edge through. “We could only hope, Mr. Potter.”

“It’s Harry, sir.” Harry moved to the door and slid through.

As Tonks went to follow, she reached out and grabbed the top sheet of Rita’s notebook and ripped the page cleanly out of the book. “Thank you, bitch.”

“Hey, that’s mine you hussy,” Rita shouted after Tonks. “Give that back.”

The doors closed with a deep thud and the locks were engaged once again. Harry looked over a sea of faces and people settling in about the room. He remembered a few of them from his trial a year ago and others from various meetings or Diagon Alley visits. He and Tonks had remained unnoticed until Kingsley moved to stand next to them.

“Tonks, I thought you were on special assignment.” Kingsley looked from her to Harry and back again waiting for an answer.

“Kingsley,” Tonks said with a bit of surprise. “Kingsley, have you met Harry? Harry this is Kingsley; Kingsley this is Harry. What a great chance to meet new people, eh? Well, we must be moving along now. Great talking to you.” Tonks ushered Harry away from Kingsley by nearly pushing him over.

Ignoring the interesting way in which she spoke to her boss, Harry asked the question he couldn't stop himself from asking. "In trouble, Tonks?"

"Not until now, Harry," Tonks replied through gritted teeth. "I am going to need to smooth this over somehow. He thought I was on some special assignment for the Ministry. Not that you aren't special and all, but I doubt you fit into his idea of what special is concerning work."

"I am sure we can fix it, Tonks." Harry moved around the room at Tonks' direction and soon found himself in a corner off to the left side of the room. He watched the witches and wizards find their seats as the time approached as they were only a few minutes away from the session being called to order.

"Harry?" Harry turned to find Susan Bones sitting in a chair against the wall.

"Susan," Harry responded. "How are you doing this summer?"

"Things have been crazy the last few days, thanks to you. Auntie can't seem to calm down since the article."

"Ah, yes, that can happen I guess," Harry floundered wondering if her comment was out of anger or something else. Her giddy smile told him what he needed to know. "Had fun though?"

"It is rare to see Aunt Amelia flustered," Susan said happily. "She has been running around trying to keep things going as Fudge looks to be on his way out. Come to see the festivities then?"

"Come to make sure that he doesn't sneak out of it," Harry said with conviction as they were joined by a rather frazzled Amelia Bones.

"I am not sure whether to thank you or kill you, Harry," Amelia said quietly to the small group. "Do you have any idea the storm you caused with that article? I know you understood my meaning, but did you have to be so blunt with it?"

“Susan was just giving me a quick rundown of how things have been.” Harry cracked a smile for the first time since he had appeared outside the Ministry.

“Oh, and I am sure my niece has given you the fair and balanced account too,” Amelia remarked staring Susan down. “Knowing her, she probably had me running around the house firing spells off in all directions like a mad woman.”

“There might have been a few misdirected spells, but I am sure you had good cause for them.” Harry watched as Susan laughed and Amelia tried to look furious.

“As cheeky as your father you are, Harry,” Amelia informed him.

“Now you see what I put up with,” Tonks added.

“About that,” Harry offered as a matter of passing information. “Kingsley Shacklebolt may have a few questions as to where Tonks has been lately. It would be a terrible mess if he started digging around in her business. I am only concerned about a friend of mine.”

“If things go the way I think they will, Harry,” Amelia mimicked his tone. “I wouldn’t worry about his questions. He might be too busy to worry about the small things.”

“I am here to see that things do go properly.” Harry’s smile died a quick death as he focused on the matter at hand. Susan and Amelia couldn’t help but take notice of how sharply his mood changed. A chime sounded in the room getting certain people to their feet as they advanced to the front of the room.

“I have to go, sweetie,” Amelia said softly to Susan. She nodded to Harry and Tonks and joined the others as they settled into their assigned seats.

Harry drifted into the shadows and stood next to Tonks against the wall. As order was achieved, Fudge entered from a side room. Parts of the room booed him and a few shouts of various crimes rang out. The chime sounded again and with more authority bringing the

discord under control in moments. Albus Dumbledore stood and raised his hands silencing the murmurs around the room.

"I bring this vote into session. We are here to decide whether Cornelius Fudge shall be given a vote of no confidence or remain in office for the duration of his term. We shall hear from Minister Fudge before we vote. Minister, the floor is yours for a short time."

Fudge stepped forward and smiled his best politician's smile. He tried to make eye contact with as many people as he could before speaking. "I feel this is a misuse of our time. We should be concentrating on making our community safe not trying to punish me for things that were out of my control. I have done my best to protect us. I feel that I know how to finish the job. The only reason we are here is because of a boy and an article in a rather questionable magazine. I doubt the validity of the article wholeheartedly."

"Are you calling me a liar?" Harry stated firmly. "Again? How many times have I lied about Voldemort?"

The room shuddered as one and many shrieks and yells could be heard. Many in the room started looking around as if the Dark Lord would appear next to them and end their life in an instant. Harry stepped out of the shadows and into the torch light from a nearby source. Half of the room stilled while the other half looked on in interest.

"First off, it is just a name," Harry said to Fudge ignoring all the others. "The name, Voldemort," more shudders, "means nothing. It is made up anyway. Second, how many times have you seen Voldemort, Fudge?"

The room continued to shudder as did Fudge. People were noticing that their current leader couldn't even hear the name without feeling the same fear they did. The people wanted a leader who was better than themselves. Otherwise, why not lead yourself. Fudge stared Harry down as he formulated his answer. Harry met his gaze with one of his own. Only Harry's stare was filled his power, determination, and anger. Fudge hesitated before answering which much of the room noticed.

"I have seen You-Know-Who once, Potter. You know that since you were there."

"Yes, I was there. I could tell you how many times I have seen Voldemort," Harry put extra emphasis on the name getting a stronger reaction from Fudge. "But the number means little to me. All I know is that I have dueled him and I am still here. I have stared into his eyes, or what he calls eyes, and yet I still live. I have nothing to gain by lying about Voldemort."

"You have nothing to gain?" Fudge laughed. "You are trying to overthrow the Ministry. You are trying to put your puppets in power so you can continue your ways of breaking every rule that exists."

Harry kept his face impassive as he answered the charge. "You give me too much credit, Fudge, and Voldemort too little. I have no interest in politics. I am putting no one anywhere. I am still in school and have a lot to learn about magic. But I do know that you are as false a person as I have ever met. You have no idea what to do, and even worse you try to blame those who are doing something good for your failings. I should know as you have blamed me for many things lately. All I have done is tried to tell people that Voldemort is back and wishing him away won't work, Fudge."

"You are a power hungry boy with delusions of grandeur, Potter."

"Your track record concerning who I am is not something you should bandy about, Fudge. You have yet to get it right."

Fudge fumed as Harry folded his arms and moved back into the shadows only the fire light had been increased near Harry preventing him from hiding completely. The room watched as Harry remained calm and Fudge became angry. Many of the quiet murmurs returned much to Fudge's increasing displeasure.

"Minister," Albus asked with a touch of sympathy, "are you finished addressing the voting members?"

Fudge turned to look at Dumbledore catching an idea of how the room had taken in the latest information. Things did not look to be in favour of Cornelius Fudge. "I, uh, will close by saying that I stand by

my record as Minister. I have done so much good since I was elected to office. This is just a bump in the road, as it were. Together, we can overcome this. Thank you.”

Susan never looked away from Harry’s face once he had started speaking. She had never heard anyone, not even Dumbledore himself, speak of Voldemort in a way that made her feel that she too could challenge his power and succeed. She watched Harry lean against the wall with an intent air about him while maintaining his calm appearance. She saw his eyes rove the crowd slowly as many of them still watched The-Boy-Who-Lived. Susan felt Harry’s presence as he firmly held his place in the room.

Tonks managed to slide closer to Harry and worm her hand up to his shoulder without making any obvious movements. She patted and rubbed it slowly willing him to feel her support when she knew he needed it most. The conflict was over and Harry always questioned his actions after the deed was done. He always second guessed himself and he never had someone there to support anything he had done. Tonks did her best to let him know she supported him.

The people in the room moved about and those who could vote did so by raising their wands and announcing their intent. Harry waited as the votes were tallied. He watched Fudge as the votes were added together and a consensus was reached. Fudge frowned and dropped his head in defeat. He had been given a vote of no confidence and his term as Minister was over.

As he began to leave, a few aurors moved to either side of him and took his arms. A short scuffle was quickly quelled as Fudge was escorted out of the room. Amelia returned to her place by her niece. She managed a subtle smile in Harry’s direction which he returned before watching government at work once again.

“Now, that we have settled the first item of business,” Albus spoke to the room. “We shall entertain candidates for Minister. Are there any nominations?”

Chatter broke out amongst nearly every person in the room. Harry watched as a few people seemed to stand taller and more official as their friends and supporters encouraged them to offer their name. A

few members of the Wizengamot watched Harry as closely as he watched the room. Some seemed to come to an agreement and began to speak to their neighbors.

The first person to voice his candidacy was someone Harry had never heard of before. He received a second from a smallish woman on the far side of the room. His name was put on a list that had no others. Susan looked to her aunt and kept motioning with her head to give her name. Amelia kept her stern appearance in place as she ignored her well-meaning niece.

"I offer Charles DeLong," said a stout man with a wild mustache. The man named was tall and proper looking as he rose from his seat and accepted the offer. It was seconded and his name joined the first.

Harry was beginning to notice that he was getting more and more attention as the minutes ticked by. He found Albus watching him very closely as was Amos Diggory and Arthur Weasley. Harry worked to keep his posture and appearance stoic as more of the room seemed to follow Albus' direction.

"I offer Amelia Bones," said Amos Diggory as he met Harry's eyes.

Harry saw hope and sadness in his eyes. He felt the man's emotions as if they were his own. He was doing this out of respect for Harry and everything he had done and tried to do for those who didn't deserve it. Harry simply blinked in acceptance of the gesture. Amelia stood as all eyes spun to her. She accepted the nomination graciously.

"I second the nomination." Harry nearly lost his composure as he looked to the most unlikely of supporters. His white beard twitched as he smiled at Amelia when she nodded to him. Albus Dumbledore had voiced his opinion on a political matter and one as important as the office of Minister.

The entire room stopped as they assimilated what this meant to the Wizarding world. Albus had stayed neutral years ago when Fudge had run and won the position. All attempts to get Albus into the office had been politely rebuffed with as much respect and humility as Albus could manage. The other two hopefuls, who had once worn

wide smiles, felt their chances crash into the dirt the moment Albus supported Amelia.

After people came to terms with Amelia being the obvious front runner, they all seemed to look to Harry once more. They were mostly surprised when his face softened to a smile and he broke from his place against the wall. The-Boy-Who-Lived turned and walked out of the room wearing a slight smile. The crowd allowed him an easy path out and Tonks followed him closely keeping her wand at the ready. He exited the doors only to be met by the members of the press and the aurors guarding the doors.

No one asked a question, no one said a word as Harry moved beyond them and into the lift. Once they fought their way through the atrium crowd with a little help from a few well placed Repelling Charms, Harry and Tonks climbed into the phone booth and left the Ministry only to Apparate back to the team room seconds later.

"Never a dull day with you, huh?" Tonks asked cheekily.

"What did you expect me to do?" Harry queried trying to be cheeky as well but failing as he was feeling the exhaustion from the last hour. "I couldn't let that man call me a liar again. If he had gotten even a few more people to side with him, nothing would have changed but make him look even more right."

"Harry," Tonks said softly as she moved in front of him and pressed herself against Harry's front. "I was only joking. You are wound way to tight right now. Maybe I should do something about that." Tonks smirked and bounced her eyebrows at Harry while nodding in the direction of the couch in the room.

Harry blushed before he could stop it. "You are joking, right? Here? Now?"

Tonks moved even closer and stretched her head to meet his ear. "Of course I am joking, silly. Do you have any idea how untethered Horace would get if he found us shagging in the team room? Oh boy that would be a good one though." Tonks laughed loudly and grabbed onto Harry to prevent herself from falling over. "It would almost be

worth it.” Tonks started looking hungrily at Harry as she smoothed her restored grey colored cloak.

“You’re funning with me again, aren’t you?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“We are back to the first week of summer again where you try to embarrass me for your own fun.”

“Only this time, I am not teasing. If you call my bluff, you will most likely win in the end.” Tonks smirked evilly before she changed to her normally happy look. “Well, back to it I guess. Come on Harry, better not keep Horace waiting.” Tonks flipped up her hood and hopped over to the door.

“Bloody woman is going to torture me to death if she keeps this up.” Harry donned his hood and followed Tonks to the training room for more punishment.

Before they could join Horace and Cal, Marcus caught them for a quick question. “So, who is Minister?”

“Not Fudge,” Harry stated before walking off to Cal who was being instructed on a new curse by Horace.

“When we left, it looked like Amelia was going to get it.” Tonks caught up to Harry a short distance away.

“Never stand in his way, Marcus,” Marcus said to himself out loud. “It isn’t a wise place to be. Learn from others if you can. It saves time and embarrassment, and it’s more fun to watch, too.”

Monday afternoon carried on with Harry being forced to learn how to use the Imperius Curse expertly and with exacting speed. Horace had to beat down Harry’s happiness from the voting before he was mad enough to use the Unforgivable like he should.

The vote had been held and Amelia had been elected as Minister with a majority of the votes even with two other candidates in the running. Tuesday morning when Harry came into the team room,

Marcus was waiting for him and Tonks. He handed Harry a note and told him that any outgoing mail for him was being intercepted by the Department to avoid untimely mail delivery should he be training or on a mission.

The note was from Amelia and not as the Minister of Magic. It went on to debate whether or not Harry was good or a curse. Amelia settled on a wait-and-see approach until she figured out if being Minister was worth the trouble.

Her elevation in standing increased, Amelia had appointed Kingsley to her old position. As Harry thought about how everything had worked out, he didn't know if Dumbledore had predicted it as such. Many questions ran through Harry's head as Horace continued his learn-by-doing instruction technique.

As the day progressed and Harry learned a handful of new spells that compressed the air in the affected area, produced a blinding light, countered various Binding spells, or reversed the flow of blood where the spell struck; Harry kept dwelling on how Tonks had been used the day before. Repeatedly, Horace would attack Tonks with the Imperious Curse just to force Harry to fight back as strongly as he could. Harry refused to put everything he had into the dark curse unless Tonks was a victim.

Horace watched and waited for the right opportunity to tell Harry how his ideals were getting in the way of his abilities. He never saw the right time until Harry failed to protect himself from a nasty Repelling Curse while trying to deflect a Cutting Curse from hitting Tonks in the back.

"Ceps!" Horace yelled, halting the training program. "Room three, now!" Horace turned and walked out of the training room and down the hall without looking back.

Harry picked himself off the floor quickly, rubbing out the new bruise he knew was starting to form on his shoulder, and followed Horace. Walking the barren hallway, softly lit by magical light, Harry turned into the open doorway of number three. Horace was standing behind his desk looking at the rear wall showing his back to Harry. Choosing to stay silent, Harry moved to stand beside the only visitor chair in the

room. The formal, straight-backed chair looked to be seldom used as dust could be seen on the seat undisturbed.

With a motion of his wand, Horace closed the door sharply without turning around. Harry calmed his mind and stayed at the ready to defend himself. The flicker of the torch from the moving air was the only source of light and sound in the room until Horace sighed.

“Do you hate me, Potter?”

Surprised by the direct question, Harry hesitated before answering. “At times, yes, I hate you.”

“What times are those?”

“When you target Tonks when you should target me.”

Horace turned and looked Harry over. His eyes wondered the strong and determined form that was Harry Potter. “Two weeks ago, you were scared, confused, and lost. Today, you have determination, drive, and focus. Do you know how that was achieved?”

Harry stayed silent as he could only guess at what Horace was trying to hint at. “I have taught people with less talent than you,” Horace said calmly. “I have trained people more dense than you. I have killed people with a greater grasp on magic than you.” Horace paused for a few minutes before continuing. “Never have I instructed someone so willing to protect another that their own life means nothing to them. Have you so little to live for that you don’t care what happens to you?”

“I am not sure what you mean.”

“Tonks can take care of herself,” Horace explained. “She has been doing this for awhile and she is still here. She counts on you doing your job so she can do hers. If she lacks the ability to stop a simple Cutting Curse, she deserves what happens to her. You allowed your concern for her to shift your focus and you were beaten for your trouble.

“I am a bastard so those I train will want to win just to prove that I am wrong about them. I am hard on them so they will be stronger when it

counts most. I watched how you handled yesterday's training. You wanted to kill me for attacking Tonks. You wanted to hurt me so badly that you nearly did so. I see you holding back when we are training. Why won't you use all that magic that you have at your fingertips? Are you afraid? Are you too weak to control it?"

"I have seen what becomes of those who give themselves to magic," Harry blurted out before railing on. "I have seen what dark magic can do to someone. I have felt what it is like from the inside. I have felt that way recently, now and then. I don't like what it felt like."

Harry found himself out of breath as he finished his words. A constant gnawing had been growing in his mind as he became more skilled in the magic Horace had been teaching him. Harry lowered his head and it shook slightly. "I will not become like him. Keeping her safe helps me keep the urges at bay. Every time I use an Unforgivable, the urge becomes stronger. I feel the power waiting for me to grab on to it. It calls to me. I can't take it. I must not take it."

For the first time since Harry entered the room, Horace softened his mood. He moved to sit in his medium-backed chair gesturing for Harry to do the same. "Knowing dark spells does not make you evil, Potter. Using them does not make you evil unless you use them for evil. Hell, any spell can be used for dark reasons. I could levitate someone off a building or summon their broom out from under them while in flight. As you well know, intent is the key to so much in dealing with magic.

"You have more intent than you know what to do with and you are conflicted because of it." The confused look on Harry's face forced a clarification. "What is the one thing you must do in your life? What do you feel so compelled to do that you know you will do it? I see the effects of it in you. Every action, every thing you do seems driven by something."

Harry sighed as he knew the answer regardless of some prophecy made years ago and only recently revealed. "I must kill Voldemort." Harry spoke simply and with no emphasis. He merely stated a simple fact that he had been wrestling with since the shock of learning the prophecy had worn off.

Horace let out a nervous chuckle. "That explains a lot, Harry." Horace smiled and pulled open a drawer on his desk. He pulled out a bottle of muggle whiskey and uncorked it with one hand as he pulled out a pair of glasses from the same drawer with the other. He filled one glass full and half for the other. Seeming to contemplate the situation, Horace pushed the full one towards Harry while picking up the remaining one.

"Quite some thing you have to do," Horace stated while raising his glass in a toasting motion. Harry followed his lead and did the same with the full glass. "To revenge for the fallen." Horace took a drink as Harry wavered.

"Revenge has nothing to do with it," Harry said staring at the liquid moving around in his glass. "It's just the way it is." Harry took a mouth full of the smooth liquid and swallowed it down. The effects were slightly delayed, but Harry soon felt the burning creep up his throat causing him to cough at the sensation.

"I will not ask you to explain, but do not see it as a bad thing. Killing that, thing, will be one of the greatest accomplishments in this century. Heroes have done less and gotten more. I have lost eight people that I cared about to that man. If I have the chance to kill him, I will do it without a second's thought."

"You would fail and he would kill you for trying," Harry answered while staring at the glass deciding whether or not to finish his drink. "I have lost my family to him. I have seen him kill. I have seen him torture. I have felt his emotions. I am afraid that I will become like him if I give in to my magic. He did that and you see what he is now. All he had to live on for thirteen years was his magic. I would rather die than become what he was. You asked why I hold back, why I protect Tonks like I do. That is why. If I give up my humanity, then I become just like him."

"You do not have the ability to give up enough to become like him," Horace said fiercely. "I see who you are every day I force you to use these spells. You have resisted me from the beginning and you have more innate skill with them than any others yet. I can not tell you how completely enjoyable and utterly frustrating it has been teaching you."

I see your potential, and it is amazing, and then you fight me when I try to bring it out.”

Horace smiled a distant smile as he watched Harry puzzling at his comment. The confusion faded as Harry downed the rest of his glass. Harry fought the coughs as he set the empty tumbler on the desk. A green, penetrating stare fixed Horace and prevented any thoughtful movement. Horace planned out his next statement carefully.

“I am not training a murderer, Harry,” Horace admitted. “I am training a survivor. Both one that is and will be so again. I have no doubt that you will defeat the Dark Lord. I have seen the fight in your eyes when you are left with few options. My only saving grace is that you know I am not your enemy. When you kill for the first time, you will be broken for a time. I can tell you that it will pass with a little help from friends. Remember, we are all potential killers. Most of us just haven’t been put in a situation to prove it.”

“I almost killed someone recently,” Harry confessed and stared at a spot on the floor. “I wanted to. I didn’t think about it, I just wanted to do it.”

“What stopped you?”

“Tonks stopped me. I was going to do it for her, but she told me to do it for myself if I wanted. I couldn’t do it for myself, because it seemed wrong. Why was it so easy to do it for her and so hard for myself?”

“The responsibility can be rationalised over two people instead of one. You can feel less guilty if you think it was for another person. Every life I have taken has been in defense of another or my own. Soldiers kill to stay alive or keep their mates alive. Murderers kill for pleasure, power, or personal gain in one form or another. You do not have it in you to murder someone. Neither does Tonks. A few of the Operatives do have it in them and are watched closely to prevent them from going too far.”

“How can you be so sure? I have wanted to kill a few people in my life. I have felt it in me. I have come close a few times before but I never knew how. Now, I know how and I seem to be rather good at it.”

“In training only, Harry. You have killed in training and you know it is training. In reality, I am not sure what you will do. In the past when you wanted to kill those people, what happened?”

“Nothing, really.”

Horace settled back into his chair and smiled again. “Exactly my point. Everyone wants to kill at some point in their life, but most never do it. Their morality or whatever stops them. I do not mean this in a bad way, but your morality is getting in the way here. I know you are afraid to give into your magic and use it fully, but you must. Tonks and Cal hang in the balance. I have said it before but hesitation kills in this business. Besides, if you start drifting to far away from who you are I think someone will help pull you back.” Horace raised his eyebrows and looked at Harry intently.

“I think that she would,” Harry relented and inhaled deeply.

“Trust that I will continue training you to use magic in ways to survive and keep your friends alive. I have yet to teach you to abuse your magic or others.” Horace watched Harry think over things. The young man sat a little taller in his chair as the seconds ticked by. Horace compared the Harry sitting in the chair in front of him to the pictures of the Harry at the vote. Slowly, the images were becoming the same.

“You are not one to take the easy way out. That is the reason I can be so sure that you will never become like that arse. Well, now we best get back to it, Ceps. Enough lying about for one day, get the job done. Now, go.”

Horace stood and watched as Harry rose to his feet. The older man extended his hand in understanding and support. Harry accepted it graciously.

The days rolled by filled with Harry working hard trying to learn all he could from Horace. As other Operatives came and went during the week, they all noticed how Ceps and Horace seemed to work together as opposed to against each other as had been the norm before.

Tonks had noticed and mentioned the change in mood between them. She never got a straight answer to her questions, but she knew that Horace had found a common link the same as he found with every trainee. She knew how the man worked and what he used to motivate others. She recognized the connection between him and Harry the very same day that it had formed.

A letter had arrived for Harry on Wednesday, via Hedwig, from Hermione. Once she had finished scolding Harry for tampering in the affairs of the Ministry, she congratulated him in ridding their world of Fudge and his politics. She finished the letter with her thoughts on how Hedwig knew she needed to send Harry a letter and various theories on the occurrence. As the berating gave way to compliments, Harry couldn't help but picture Hermione standing before him saying exactly what she had written.

Tonks had read the letter wanting to know what had been so funny, but she didn't understand how the rather unpleasant letter could be funny. It took Harry describing the images in his head before Tonks joined in the laughter.

Harry had laughed to himself until Tonks, not able to take it any more, fought him into a rather willing submission hold that led to many adult happenings. The elves had to return to noisier chores until the couple had succumbed to sleep.

Friday morning Harry awoke to find Tonks curled into him and sleeping soundly. He watched her nose twitch as it often did when she dreamed. Harry couldn't help but be fascinated by it. Her hands curled and relaxed as her eyes darted back and forth behind her lids. Her breathing sped up and slowed down in tandem with her restlessness.

Harry couldn't stop himself from petting her head and pushing her dark brown hair out of the way. Tonks had spent more and more time in her real form since they had moved to Potter Estate. Harry had encouraged it only to find Tonks using it as leverage to get things she wanted such as Harry smiling more, laughing more, and even dancing with her for a few seconds before fleeing from the room for over an hour.

As the dream ended, Harry waited for her cheery eyes to open and find him looking down at her. A shiver, running from her head to her feet, led to her eyes popping open. Harry held her tightly as Tonks' brain kicked into action. "Harry, is everything okay?" she asked slightly scared.

Harry looked around the room quickly before pulling her closer to him. "I am fine, Nymph. Everything's fine. Why are you shivering?"

Tonks breathed out and closed her eyes. She hugged him firmly before snuggling into his warmth. "Must have had a bad dream. It's nothing. Don't worry about it." Tonks moved slowly and deliberately against Harry trying to lessen his worry.

"Um, if you keep that up, Nymph, we will be five for five this week on our morning hellos."

"Imagine that," Tonks smirked and became more intent on where she touched and rubbed. "Some would think that I like you, Harry. Others would think something completely different."

"And what would that be?" Harry asked as he busied himself with kissing Tonks' bare neck.

"Something more than like." Tonks never finished her thoughts as they wound their bodies together for another late morning entry into the kitchen. The elves had gotten used to limited time for breakfast as Harry had yet to arrive with more than ten minutes to spare. Tiki could only shake her head and mumble about James and Lily as she happily prepared Tonks' food.

At first Harry was troubled by Tiki mentioning and comparing Harry and Tonks to his parents, but as he realized her meaning he grew to appreciate the references. It made him feel closer to his parents even though he couldn't remember them very well. Every once in awhile Harry would get the feeling that he remembered a room or an event as he moved about the home.

He would spend an hour nearly every night sitting in the nursery just looking around. It was in the nursery where his memories were the most acute. Sounds and smells would pop into his head for no reason

and vanish just as quickly. Tonks had figured out a perfect way to bring Harry out of the funk he would be in when he emerged from that room. Tiki could be found in the cellar or the garage cleaning during those times.

Friday's training followed the pattern of the week. Horace would teach Harry about five curses and push him until he learned them. Horace wanted to see Harry master one of the spells wandlessly before he could leave for the day. Harry chose to learn a Binding Hex that had a form of Petrificus Totalus added to it. Tonks told him that many aurors used it when arresting a suspect.

Harry and Tonks had just returned to Potter Estate, Apparating into the living room, when Harry felt a sharp stab in his head. Stumbling to his knees, Harry gritted his teeth against the pain as images that swam into his mind. Various faces and voices moved about and one name could be seen floating ghost-like in his vision, "Lovegood."

Tonks watched Harry fall and quickly moved to support him as he took laboured breaths through his clenched teeth. "Harry, what is it? Are you okay?"

Harry managed to move his left hand to Tonks' leg and held on as he fought against the agony. In the haze of the rippling pain, Harry tried to use Occlumency to control the intrusion into his mind. He was making little headway since the attack had been so unexpected he was completely caught off guard.

Tonks held him close to her as she floundered about trying to think of something, anything, to do that would help Harry. She saw his right hand covering his scar and figured that it must be the cause of the pain. "Deep breaths, Harry, dear. Slow, deep breaths. You are in control remember that. Come on, luv, fight it."

Tonks rubbed his back and held him even tighter as he seemed to gain some ground against the throbbing. As Harry slowly relaxed, Tonks began kissing his cheek and forehead. When she pulled his hand away from the scar, the angry red mark was hot on her lips as she kissed it intently. She kept whispering consoling words to Harry as his body softened and starting moving purposefully again.

The first real movement Harry did was to hug Tonks and bury his head into her chest. She kept her spot on the floor and held him as he clung to her. Only when his eyes opened did she see the true agony of the experience. Torment hung in the green orbs that searched her face desperately for something concrete to hold on to. Tonks smiled and waited for Harry to speak.

“Voldemort is sending Death Eaters after the Lovegoods. I have to help them. They are only being attacked because of me. Luna helped me in the Ministry and Odd printed the article about Fudge. I can’t let them get hurt or worse because of me. I have to go.”

“We have to go, Harry. Do not forget that I am here to keep you safe among other things. When is it happening?”

“I’m not sure, but it should be tonight I guess. I have been able to see certain things in his mind before, but everything was hazy this time. Maybe he is trying to block me out since last time hurt him or maybe I am keeping him out better. I don’t know. Still hurts though.”

“Well, what would life be like without a little drama now and then?”

“I have no idea since my life is full of drama all the time.” Harry managed a forced smile as he looked up at Tonks. He saw concern and a little playfulness in her eyes. “What?”

“Nothing, it is just not that often that I end up being the one not on the floor first. It is a nice change.” Tonks leaned down and kissed Harry softly on the lips before kissing his cooling scar once more. “I know that the Lovegoods live near the Burrow so we should start there and try to find it. Do you know how many lackeys he is sending?”

“No, but think they are new ones. I never saw faces, but their voices weren’t familiar. As nasty as this thing is,” Harry said pointing to his scar, “it comes in handy once in awhile.”

“Well, it is still light out so I doubt that they will attack now. We should eat the food that I smell before we run off and test out your skills. Trust me; I know how these sorts of things work. Ninety-five percent waiting, five percent terror. We eat, then we go, okay?”

“If you are sure,” Harry asked concerned for his friend and her father who was willing to help. Harry let Tonks pull him to his feet and they hurried into the kitchen to eat a nasty meal before Apparating to a place near the Burrow.

Not wanting to trigger the wards again, Tonks had suggested a location down the lane away from the Weasley’s home. Tonks used the “Point Me” spell to find a direction to the Lovegoods’ home. The property lied to the south beyond a grove of trees and the stream Harry had visited a few times while staying with his ‘adoptive’ family.

Harry and Tonks wrapped their cloaks around themselves and activated the invisibility feature before traveling down the lane. Ever watchful, Harry’s eyes darted back and forth as he walked silently next to Tonks. His memory concerning the Silencing spell had been consistent all week. Horace had barked at him when Harry forgot to use it before starting one day. Harry did his best to remember to use it every time it might be needed from that point on.

Tonks could feel the tension rolling off Harry as they advanced on the property. She knew Harry could handle himself and wasn’t worried about his safety, but she was concerned about what might happen if Harry had to really let loose with his magic. She knew Horace had found a way to get Harry to increase his levels, but she didn’t know if Harry was ready for everything that would follow.

They found the lane leading to the house and approached the building. Harry wasn’t sure if it was just a Lovegood thing or what, but the house looked even weirder than the Burrow. It looked like someone had but boxes together and built a home. There seemed to be a pattern to the construction, but Harry couldn’t figure it out. The roof line was broken in so many gables; Harry couldn’t keep a count of them. He turned to see Tonks staring open-mouthed at the house.

“Well, they are a different sort of people,” Tonks rationalised shaking her head. She directed Harry to a location near the side of the house where a bench and a stone-carved creature sat beneath a large tree.

Settling in to wait for the unwelcome visitors, Harry inspected the creature in the failing light from the setting sun. He almost spoke aloud when he read the inscription on the base. He was looking at the

headstone for Luna's mother. He looked at the house and wondered why he hadn't sought out his own parents' grave site. The only idea he could come up with was that seeing it in writing like that would be proof that his parents were gone.

Tonks drew her wand and cast a Silencing Sphere around them and proceeded to fade the dome into nothing. "What are you thinking about, Harry?"

"My parents. Luna probably sees this every time she comes outside. I know I could find the same thing if I looked for it, but I haven't. I am just thinking about why I haven't yet."

"Because you know there is no going back once you see it. You haven't closed that page in your life yet. Even after all these years and what everyone has told you, you still hope that they are wrong. Sadly, that is the last bit of childhood you have left."

"I want them back, but I don't know what it would be like to have them. I can only guess what they would be like."

"I guess they would be a lot like you only two separate people. Many have compared you to each of them in different ways. I think I would like them, but I know they would love you. How could they not?"

Harry sat in silence as he tried to focus on the reason for him being where he was as the night washed over them. He listened to the wind rustling the leaves above the bench and watched the lights come on and go out inside the odd shaped house that would fit into an original architecture design book. Nerves getting to him, Harry asked if they should go inside and wait or maybe try to get the Lovegoods out of the house before the Death Eaters showed up.

"Are you positive that they are coming here? Are you willing to risk the Lovegoods asking certain questions? We should wait out here until they come or until we get a better idea about when it will happen. This is how it works. Remember, ninety-five percent waiting."

Harry sighed and leaned back trying to control his quickly beating heart. He saw Tonks pull her legs up under her bum and lean over to him resting her head on his shoulder. "Normally, the waiting is with

someone who isn't interesting beyond a work relationship, but this time..." Tonks smiled coyly and laughed softly when Harry blushed lightly. "I will just lean against you until another arrangement can be thought out. No funny business, it is distracting."

Harry sighed as Tonks settled against him and put an arm around him. She seemed perfectly at home waiting and watching. Harry could barely contain his urge to knock on the door and tell them to leave, but he decided Tonks knew best in this situation. So he waited, and waited.

They changed positions as blood flow required. As Harry pondered the last few years he had spent at Hogwarts and everything that had happened to him, he heard faint pops of Apparition in the distance. Tonks managed to hold him down stopping Harry from jumping to his feet and charging after the arrivals.

"Wait for them to come to us, Harry," Tonks advised. "We have a vantage point from here. Never give up an advantage unless another one presents itself. We should wait and see how many are here before we plan our course of action."

"I am not good at planning," Harry grumbled as he searched for movement.

"You are, just not advanced planning. You do really well when you plan as you go. Most likely, we are outnumbered but we know they are here."

Slowly, dark figures emerged from the lane and spread out along the nearby trees. Harry saw three people wearing Death Eater robes and carrying their wands in their hands and at the ready. Tonks whispered in his ear to follow the one on the right. She said she would take the one on the left.

"What about the one that is left?"

"After we silently take care of the other two, we can finish him off together. It should be easy from that point on. Oh, and this is just like training. Don't get caught up on thinking it is different. Do what you always do, win."

Tonks drifted off after the figure moving to the far side of the grounds. Harry knew he needed to trust Tonks and her abilities so he sought out his own target. He crept up behind the cloaked person and watched. The person moved nervously to the rear of the house. Harry could tell that he was a new member because of the lack of confidence the person moved with.

As the person stopped and pointed his wand at the house, Harry chose which spells to use. He figured that quiet and colorless spells would be the best ones to use. Moving behind the person, Harry thought the words '*Conligo Totalus.*' His enemy went stiff and fell to the ground with a slight thud. Harry moved and grabbed the wand out of his wand and stowed it in his pocket.

The Death Eater stared into nothingness trying to see his attacker. Only when his wand was yanked from his hand and disappeared did he know that his decision to follow the Dark Lord might have been the wrong choice to make a few weeks earlier.

Harry smiled to himself as he felt a wave of success wash over him. He had done what he needed to do and no one had been hurt. Returning to the matter at hand, Harry moved towards the final person. He saw the Death Eater looking at his watch seemingly waiting for the arranged attack time. Harry tried to find Tonks who was supposed to help him, but he couldn't see her anywhere.

Panic began to rise up as Harry thought through the worst possibilities. He managed to refocus as the Death Eater put his watch away and continued counting down as he mouthed the numbers. Harry knew that he had to act before the time came, so he fired a Stunner at the Death Eater.

Red light lit up the night as the unsuspecting Death Eater dove out of the way and cast a Lighting charm on the area. The front yard was bathed in magical light as the figure moved to the trees and out of the open. He looked around quickly trying to find his would be attacker. Seeing no one, he began to cast a Fire spell only to jump out of the way of another Stunner from Harry.

Growling, Harry heard the Death Eater shout out his spells as he fired in all directions attempting to strike Harry down. Only two spells were

close and Harry had time to move out of the way instead of using a Shield spell.

Watching a tree catch on fire and huge holes spring up from the ground, Harry began his assault on the Death Eater. Spell after spell rocketed towards the man in black who moved out of the way at the last second. All thoughts of an easy victory vanished as the Death Eater moved gracefully in his defense of his freedom. Time and time again, Harry didn't know how the Death Eater had managed to at least partially predict what spell was being launched at him.

His infrequent shields were a perfect match when used and he moved like a cat just inside of the tree line. Harry pursued him but stayed far enough away as not to get trapped by his normal tendency to rush in. Horace had beaten that habit quite hard in the last week by letting Harry fight his way into the middle of a fight only to find no way back out.

Harry kept moving and firing while trying to bring the man down. His frustration grew as no matter what spell Harry used, it missed or was countered. Harry toyed with using unblockable curses but decided against it. Not once had the man used any spell worse than a Reductor Curse. Harry fought on launching spells as fast as he could. He began to see flashes of light deeper in the trees near where Tonks should have been.

The panic that he had fought down came back full force. Knowing that Tonks needed his help, Harry increased the power and the severity of his magic. A couple trees were utterly decimated by his Reductors and more than a few holes had been dug by missed Piercing hexes. His enemy moved away as fast as Harry advanced.

A returned Cutting Curse almost hit Harry in the arm which caused him to put even more intent into his spells. The air was beginning to shimmer around Harry as he poured his magic into the fight. He never noticed it, but the Death Eater did.

A shimmer appeared in the distance and it was about the size of a person. The shimmer moved quickly and with purpose. The cloaked man knew that things were not going as planned. He knew that there

was no hope of completing his mission since the occupants of the house had to have noticed the spell work by now.

Watching the figure move and attack, the man decided that retreat was his only option. Any doubt vanished as a Severing Ribbon sliced through a foot and a half thick tree immediately before him. As the shimmer continued to increase, the Death Eater Apparated away as a Bone Shattering spell advanced on his location.

Knowing that pain was in his future for his failure, the man stopped off at another location, first, to ponder what story to have ready for the Dark Lord. He knew that it had to have as much truth as possible, but certain things had to be embellished or the torture would last longer.

'Six attackers would be more convincing than one or two. Yes, six, and I lost the new guy right off. That should work for now. Oh, the Old Man owes me for what I do for him.'

Showing up last was always the worst place to be. The Dark Lord would save the last one for his object lesson. The hooded man Apparated away and appeared in the entry hall of the Dark Lord's current lodging. The aged tapestries hung from the rafters above as he moved to the meeting room.

Opening the door, screams met his ears immediately. As he worked through the reality of the situation, only one word came to mind, *'Fuck.'*

"Last I see," Voldemort queried sweetly while turning away from the crumpled and broken man lying prostrate on the ground at Voldemort's feet. "What story have you to offer for this latest defeat, Potions Master?"

"My Lord, I have no story to offer," Severus provided. "I only have what occurred."

"Your comrade has given me a tale of two people besting the three of you before you both fled in disgrace. Care to add to it?"

'Bloody idiot,' Snape thought. "We lost the new guy immediately, but there was more than two. He may have had only one, but I had five

against me. I stayed until I couldn't see how our mission could be salvaged considering how things had gone. The house would have been empty by the time we defeated our opposition. I accept whatever punishment you chose, Master." Snape bowed low and waited for the burning knives to pierce his skin.

"No matter the number of adversaries, I expect success." Voldemort fumed at the most recent failure of his followers. "Crucio," was the last word spoken that met Snape's ears before he collapsed under the effects of the spell.

Harry watched as his opponent disappeared right before his Bone Shattering spell would have connected. Harry turned to see flashes of light sparking some hundred feet or so away from his current location. He crashed through the trees and undergrowth desperately wanting to help Tonks. He broke through a shrub to find Tonks moving around the trees firing spells at another Death Eater who was far less calm and collected than Harry's had been.

He shot a spell at the man and watched as a tree shattered and fell into others with a resounding noise. Harry continued his assault by Banishing large rocks at the Death Eater followed by Stunners and the Binding spell. Harry saw Tonks move behind a large tree and spend a few minutes catching her breath.

Harry was happy that she was okay and even happier that she wasn't fighting at the moment. The Death Eater fired a few spells at Harry hitting a nearby tree and sending wooden shards in all directions. Feeling the faint sting, Harry figured that he had been hit by some of the splinters.

He drove on in his attack and launched even more curses at the man pushing him further away from Tonks and the Lovegoods. A Bone Breaking curse hit the man in the arm with a loud snap followed by a scream of pain. Harry pressed his advantage and moved against the injured man only to see him portkey away before any additional spells could find their targets.

A shout of frustration erupted from Harry's mouth at only getting one of the three Death Eaters. He wanted all of them. He wanted every single one. Any that escaped meant they could show up again and in

greater numbers too. He decided that the night was a missed opportunity as a whole. One out of three was terrible since they had an even fight from the start.

Harry turned to find Tonks making her way to him. Harry looked in her eyes and saw shame. He ignored his own thoughts and closed the distance with her quickly. "Nymph, what is wrong?"

"I messed up, Harry," Tonks hung her head. "I bugged up my approach by being my normal clumsy self. That bastard heard me and away we went. I am sorry."

"No, don't be. I couldn't finish off my guy either. He seemed to know what spells were coming right as I cast them. I didn't get into it until the end right before he Apparated away. Don't blame yourself, it is my fault."

"Exactly my point, Harry. It is neither of our faults. You will not take the blame for this since we are both responsible for it. I know you well enough to know how you would handle this outcome. We got one and that is one more than before. Every little bit helps and this one might lead us to others. I just need to make a portkey to the holding room and we can send him on. He will be kept idle until released by an Operative."

Harry thought over how Tonks had worked him. She tried to take the blame so Harry took it instead. She showed him how stupid it was to blame himself for the outcome when much of it was out of his control anyway. "You knew what I would do and used that against me, didn't you?"

"Sharp tonight, Harry. I like that. You are your worse enemy. At least you can work on that without risking your life and I plan to help you. Now, are you hurt at all?"

Harry hesitated before nodding. He held up his left arm and saw a few long pieces of wood sticking out of his cloak. The pieces were coated with a red substance that could only be blood. Tonks sighed and moved to look at the injury.

She examined it and shook her head while mumbling about not being able to take him anywhere. She smirked at Harry's surprise. "What? Please, I know what you get up to at school and this is nothing compared to that. I may be concerned about you, but I am not Molly nor am I Poppy. I can get this taken care of when we get home. Now, let's go get our 'friend' shipped off and go home."

Tonks moved to Harry's uninjured side and pulled him along. They worked their way back to where Harry had left his first obstacle. They saw a man in a multicolored robe holding his wand on the bound Death Eater while another person held a torch aloft while aiming her wand in the general vicinity of the Death Eater.

"Who are you?" Demanded Odd. "Where are your friends? Well, answer me." Odd shot a Stinging hex at the trapped man who didn't react.

"Maybe you need to kick him before he makes a sound just like a Whirling Manera, father?"

"Maybe, honey," Odd answered his daughter before kicking the Death Eater in the side eliciting a crack. "Oh, I think I broke him, honey. Maybe kicking him isn't the right way. Maybe you have to dunk him in water like a Grubbling?"

"I will get you a bucket." Luna began to move back to the house when Harry and Tonks removed the invisibility feature on their cloaks.

Two wands snapped in their direction and Odd ordered them to raise their hands. Harry held his hands out and showed it devoid of a wand. Tonks slowly returned her wand to its holder and followed Harry's lead.

"Mr. Lovegood," Harry began. "Pleasant evening, isn't it? Ah, I see you found our lost Death Eater for us. Thank you so much. We have been looking for him since his friends ran off on us. Terribly sorry to disturb you, but if you would be so kind to let us deal with him from here on."

Odd kept his wand out but he seemed to be thinking something over. When his eyes widened and his wand started to drop, Tonks seized the opportunity to continue Harry's line of thought.

"I see that you have taken good care of our, well, person, I guess. We can handle him from here though so you won't need a bucket of water at this time. Though, I will tell you that the kicking idea was spot on. I think he might need another one just to be sure though."

Odd closed his mouth and gave another kick to the man's side. Tonks moved forward and dropped the portkey onto the man's chest and he was whisked away in a blink of an eye. "Thank you so much for minding him while we were busy with the others. I would suggest that you see about adding wards to your property since it appears that a certain, thing, has taken an interest in you."

"Yes," stammered Odd as he understood the situation. "I see that doing good in our world tends to attract attention. Oh well, if you are going to do something, do it right. Um, thank you for being here. Am I right in my guess as to who you people are?"

"If you think we don't exist and were never here, then yes, you are right," Tonks hinted at the only way the evening could end.

"Well then," Odd motioned to his daughter. "Since you were never here and we never saw you then we must have been sleeping soundly all night. And what a wonderful night it is."

"Excellent then," Tonks turned to Harry and nodded to him to Apparate away. Together, they disappeared with hardly a sound.

"Father, who were they?" Luna asked in an airy and unfocused manner.

"They weren't Unspeakables and they were never here, honey. Now why don't you go on in while I see if I can remember those wards I learned so many years ago."

Luna had just entered the house and closed the door when Arthur, Bill, and Molly ran up the path wands out and ready to use. "Odd, is everything okay?" Arthur asked scanning the property which had

been lit by Bill's Flare Charm. Trees were toppled and dirt was scattered about. It looked as if a war had taken place.

"Arthur," Odd chimed in his near musical voice. "Everything's fine here. How about over by you? Wonderful weather we are having, isn't it?"

"Odd," Molly gasped as she surveyed the damage. "Is Luna alright? Did they get into the house?"

Odd looked at both elder Weasleys before inclining his head. "No one was here and they don't exist, Arthur. If you get my meaning."

Arthur looked at the damage and met Odd's gaze. "They weren't here and don't exist?" He asked trying to hint at what he believed to be the truth.

"Exactly," Odd nodded. "And the Death Eaters seemed to have run off before we could cross wands." Odd's smile faded as he wiped at his brow thinking about everything that could have happened.

Molly nudged Arthur and gave him 'the look.' Arthur sighed and made his decision. "Odd, I was wondering if you would like to meet a few people I know who are interested in others who do what is right regardless of what could happen?"

Odd motioned discretely with his left hand as he answered. "I seem to have angered those who dislike Harry Potter." Odd looked at an ancient tree which lay in ruins on the edge of his property. "I would do it again. To hell with them and You-Know-Who. I like my chosen side."

"Well," Arthur said moving close to Odd and speaking in a whisper. "Then I think you should stop by Hogwarts and have a visit with Professor Dumbledore. Tell him a phoenix asked you to stop by."

"Really?" Odd queried. "What a night that didn't happen."

"Do you need some help, Odd," Molly asked gesturing to the carnage. "Our Bill is rather good with wards and such."

Bill rejoined the group after having walked the grounds looking for more Death Eaters and at the damage. He was shocked at the level of destruction in the forest. "If you would like me to put a few wards up so you can sleep a little more soundly tonight, I would be willing. Tomorrow, we can plan out a complete system of wards and alerts like we have at the Burrow."

"That is so very nice of you," Odd accepted the offer. "I will make my visit after we have settled on a plan then."

Harry arrived in his living room next to Tonks and tossed off his hood. He grimaced as the adrenaline began to fade and the pain started to take over. Tonks went to his left side and cringed. She moved Harry to the couch and removed his cloak. Her concern was obvious and Harry was confused.

"What happened to I have had worse at school? How bad is it?"

"Shush, that was when we were in the field. If you can walk and aren't dying right away, you are fine. We are at home now and I can let my emotions do what they will. Oh Harry, this must hurt. Um, Tiki, I need some help in here."

As soon as the words 'Tiki' and 'help' left her lips, Tiki appeared next to Tonks. The little elf's eyes bulged before she got down to business. She disappeared and reappeared with a bag full of medical supplies. Tiki looked hopefully at Tonks as she awaited instructions. "Just like Master James. Always getting hurt. Tiki help like Tiki help Mistress Lily."

Tonks went to work removing the splinters and cleaning the wound. Harry had to fight through the pain as he felt every centimeter of wood as it was pulled from his body. "I thought these cloaks were supposed to protect us?"

"Without it, the wood would have gone clean through tearing everything in its path. At least none of it appears to be imbedded in your bones. That would be a completely different kind of hurt."

"As long as it isn't as bad as the Cruciatus, I think I could take it."

“That is my Harry, always drawing on past experiences to make me care that much more.”

The removal and repair from the injury went on for the better part of a half hour. Tonks left Tiki in charge and Harry to rest when she went to the holding room in the Ministry to sort out the captured Death Eater. When she returned to Harry, she found him still asleep and checked the bandaged wound. It had closed up and was healing quickly thanks to a Skin Knitting potion Tiki had in her kit.

“Harry,” Tonks said softly. “Harry, maybe you should come up to bed. There is no sense in sleeping down here when you have such a wonderful place upstairs. You even have a sexy woman waiting for you.”

With his eyes still closed, Harry replied. “Well, if you are here, then who is in my bed? And don’t tell me that it is Tiki.” Harry opened his eyes and smiled at Tonks.

“If you give me a few minutes, I can chuck the usurper out on her ear. Then, I will be the sexy woman in your bed. How does that sound?”

“Like something to look forward to, Nymphadora. Let’s go, I am kind of tired.”

Tonks walked Harry up the stairs and into the bathroom and helped him get ready. He was stiff from the fight and his wound was quite tender to the touch as Tonks found out when she grabbed the wrong arm trying to direct him into the bedroom. Once she had apologized and assisted Harry into his normal sleeping attire, Tonks kissed him passionately.

She messed his already unruly hair even more and proceeded to rub her body against his taking special care to stay away from his arm. “I am sorry about before. I am willing to try and make things up to you, Harry. Do you have any ideas in mind as to how I can do that?”

Tonks gave him a cheeky smile and kissed him from the top of his head to his waist. She never made it further than that much to Harry’s pleasure. As the night advanced, Harry and Tonks entertained themselves until Harry finally gave in to his exhaustion.

Tonks curled up and watched Harry sleep beside her. She thought how fast they had moved in their relationship. She had never talked to Harry about what they were, but as she had learned she doubted that Harry had any clue what to call them. She figured that they were what they were and to leave it alone. She knew Harry was not one to mess about and he had little chance to do so since he spent nearly every second with her anyway.

“You are an important part of my life, Harry. You had better stay that way or I will get Hermione and Ginny to help me haunt you forever.” Tonks giggled at how silly her statement had sounded. She really was immature for her age. As she thought about it, she realized that it was Harry who made her act like she did. No matter how she put the pieces together, it always came down to the raven haired man next to her.

‘As it should be,’ she thought to herself as she hugged Harry to her and drifted off to sleep.

12. Lost Childhood

Harry rolled over and felt a slightly painful pulling sensation on his arm. It was an unpleasant feeling and he wanted it to stop. Eyes open, Harry looked down at the source of the irritation. He saw the bandage over his wound and started remembering the night before.

The frustration of never beating his second opponent dominated his memories. Harry tried to figure out another way he could have won the fight, but he couldn't think of anything that would have worked short of using an unblockable curse. He continued to fume until a feathery sigh distracted him.

Harry looked at Tonks who was draped across his body sleeping soundly. Harry focused on her slight movements as she breathed. He couldn't help but think of what could have happened to her if he had been beaten. She was holding her own when he got to her, but if his guy had teamed up with hers she could have been hurt or killed.

As the dreadful thoughts swam around in his mind, he instinctively pulled Tonks further up to his chest and held her tightly. The more he thought the more he realized that Tonks depended on him doing his part. It all came down to what Horace had been saying in training. Everyone was responsible for their part. The team relied on each of the parts carrying their own weight. If one broke down, all of it could fall apart and people could get hurt.

Concentrating on the what ifs, led Harry to reconsider his reasoning behind the entire summer thus far. *'Am I ready for all of this? Can I do what needs done when it needs done?'* These thoughts dominated his time as Tonks woke to the tight embrace from Harry.

She looked forward and saw Harry's arms wrapped around her body holding her tightly. She felt safe and secure with him. She had never felt so close to someone who wasn't a family member. She reveled in the feelings washing over her. As the minutes passed, her feisty nature returned. She slowly moved her hand up Harry's chest trying to get to his face unnoticed.

She knew he was awake, but his focus wasn't on her at the moment. She paused when he tightened his hold for a second. Once he

relaxed again, she continued on to her goal. Tonks managed to get her hand to his face and caressed it gently as she gazed into his unfocused eyes. After a few seconds, she saw those green eyes shift to her face and bore into her soul.

Her sleepy and playful smile faded as she read Harry's expression. Concern, desire, drive, and need were all visible. "Harry, what is it?"

"I promise that I will do better next time, Nymph. I didn't do what I should have yesterday. I could have beaten my guy, but I, I don't know, I guess I didn't want it bad enough or something."

"You did just fine, Harry. I didn't get my guy either so I have no room to talk bad about your performance."

"You could have been hurt. I can't let that happen. It would have been my fault if I lost and then you would have had two people to fight at once. All that Horace has been saying is starting to make sense. I will not fail you, Nymph. I can't fail you."

"Harry, shh." Tonks pulled herself up to Harry and proceeded to give him light kisses as he calmed down. She would look at him after each one before giving him another. "We learn something after every fight, Harry. If you are around to learn it, then you did okay." Tonks continued kissing Harry as the concern slipped away and the other emotions came to the surface.

Tonks found herself under Harry as he showered her with kisses and pressed himself against her naked body. She felt desire controlling his actions as he pushed her in very friendly ways. Feeling her body react in kind, Tonks let go of what little resolve she had. "Harry, I am always ready when you are."

Harry responded by running his hand up the length of her body eliciting a slight shiver as he brushed certain spots lightly. At her moan, Harry connected with Tonks and poured himself into the actions. The desire and need were so overpowering that Harry felt like a passenger in his quest to become one with Tonks.

All he could think about was her getting hurt because of him. Every time a thought like that came into his mind, Harry held Tonks tighter.

Every worry and fear was excised as he made love to her. It took his utter collapse before his brain reengaged.

"Harry, that was, I don't know, amazing," Tonks breathed as she fought to regain her breath. "What brought that on? Not that I am complaining, mind you."

"I could have lost you last night. I don't think I could take it."

"You didn't almost lose me, Harry. Remember, if it gets too bad, we retreat. Do not forget that if you think you are in over your head. I don't want to lose you because you forgot you could escape. How silly would that be?"

"Pretty thick, but I am rather thick at times I guess." Harry smirked at his insult.

Tonks smirked as well, but in a more suggestive way. "In more ways than one, Harry." She watched as Harry figured it out and his mouth dropped open. His lowered regions twitched a little too. "Exactly, luv."

"You are bad, you know that?"

"As bad as you want me to be." Tonks' smirk disappeared as Harry took up the challenge with renewed determination.

It was an hour later when Harry awoke to Dobby bouncing on his bed. Harry lifted his head out of Tonks hair and looked at the elf happily bouncing up and down on the foot of the bed. "Ah, Dobby, do you need something?" Harry checked to see if any of Tonks was exposed, but he found that he was covering most of her form that the sheet didn't.

"Dobby not need things, Harry. Dobby is waiting for Harry to wake. Dobby has breakfast ready for Harry."

"Thank you, Dobby. I guess we could be downstairs in a few minutes."

“Harry not need go downstairs.” Dobby snapped his fingers and two trays of food appeared and hovered above the bed. “Tiki make Tonks’ tray. She not let Dobby make it.”

“Thank you, Dobby, and thank Tiki for me too.” Harry watched Dobby lower the trays to the foot of the bed and disappear with a crack.

“Funny elf, but what else could you expect with you, huh Harry?” Tonks asked as she pulled herself into a sitting position. Harry couldn’t stop himself from staring as her breasts were completely exposed in her new position. She pulled the tray into her lap and started eating. “What? It is not like you haven’t seen them before. Actually, you have done a lot more than see them if I remember correctly.”

Harry shook himself back to reality and formulated a response. “That is true, but I have never seen them in a situation like this. The other times we were doing stuff. Right now, we are eating like normal people. I don’t know why, but it is different all the same.”

“Hmm, well, I guess that is true, but I don’t have a problem with it. Do you?”

“Oh, no. No problem at all, Nymph.” Harry couldn’t help but look at Tonks.

“You had better start eating or it will get cold. If I am distracting you too much, I can cover them up.”

“Oh, no need for that,” Harry said quickly earning him a knowing smile from Tonks. He started eating but his eyes routinely drifted back to Tonks’ exposed chest. When she would laugh at him, they would bounce further confounding Harry. It was a long breakfast with numerous laughs coming from Tonks.

A very late morning found Harry and Tonks leaving the house and wondering the grounds carrying two old brooms that had been found in a cupboard. Harry walked around the house once and saw a greenhouse, a gravel path, and the stables. As they neared the stables, Jules met them giving each a sniff before calmly following them around. The stables were old and made of huge timbers hewn

from massive trees. The runner in the center of the roof ran the full length and was a single piece of wood from one very old tree.

Harry counted ten stalls on each side with an oversized one for Jules near the main entrance. Tonks had been hesitant to stand near Jules, but with Harry showing open affection for her Jules seemed to accept Tonks' presence, but subtly tried to keep Tonks separate from Harry. Harry inspected the stalls and could see faint hoof marks in the dirt.

"I wonder if we have any horses." Harry asked no one in particular.

"No horses, Harry," Paul announced as he walked around the corner of a stall Harry had yet to look into. "Horses pass years ago. If Harry want horses, Paul get horses."

"Do you want a horse, Paul?"

"Paul want what Harry want."

"I have never had a horse, nor have I ridden one. I wouldn't know the first thing about them. If you would like to have one, get it. I am sure I can afford one."

"It is Harry's decision about horses, not Paul's."

"Paul, this is your house too. I leave it up to you to choose. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Does Harry require anything?"

Harry shook his head and Paul drifted off in a rather lost fashion. Turning to Tonks, he sighed. "I think there is something wrong with him."

"He is old and so much has happened to him, Harry. You aren't going to change him. He is too set in his ways for that. Just treat him as you do the others and he will be fine."

Harry put his arm around Tonks and hugged her to him. With a light kiss to her temple, they moved on to the path. Harry followed it around a copse of trees and over the stream that ran on the property.

The gravel glistened in the sunlight as the quartz in the rock reflected the rays.

The path diverged at one point. It veered north into the trees or east along the base of a hill. Harry selected the east path as their course. As they rounded a mound of earth, Harry stopped and looked out into an open field. His eyes lit up and his arms fell to his sides. The broom was released and hovered next to him. Tonks placed her hand on his shoulder and gripped him firmly.

“Go on, it is yours to enjoy.”

“Join me?” Harry said as he hopped on the broom and took off as fast as he could. It wasn’t Firebolt speeds but it was the best he could do until he retrieved his beloved broom from Hogwarts. Harry flew along the ground to the middle of the clearing then pulled straight up into a slow spiral until he came even with the tree tops.

After leveling off and hovering for a bit, Harry turned to watch Tonks join him side-by-side. “A natural aren’t you?”

“So I have been told. I can’t believe it. I have always hoped, but it was always a dream.”

“Harry, did you honestly think that your father wouldn’t have a Quidditch pitch if it was possible?”

“Well, I didn’t know. For all I knew, our house was destroyed and I had nothing but some money in Gringotts.”

“When you are wrong, you really do it up proper don’t you?”

“Yes, I do, Nymph.” Harry whooped once before diving straight down at the ground. He pulled up about ten feet off the ground and flew along the perimeter of the field. White stone blocks ringed the pitch demarking the boundary. Six gold hoops were placed at the ends of the pitch. They stood tall and proud against the blue sky, green grass, and sparkling sun.

After ringing the pitch, Harry flew around each of the goals using them as opposing players. He paused for a few minutes to close his

eyes and absorb the liberating feeling of flight. A rustle of cloth told him that Tonks had joined him again.

“Next to spending time with you and my friends, this is the best thing in the world. If I could fly for the rest of my life, I would do it in a heart beat.”

“You could try for professional teams after you graduate. I am confident that you would make it onto a team.”

“If only that could happen, Nymph. No Death Eaters, no Dumbledore, just me and the snitch and the other Seeker. It is so simple and I love it.”

“Well, I am not much at seeking, but I can try and give you a run for your money.”

“That sounds great, but I don’t have a snitch.”

“Didn’t you see the shed under the trees to the south? I bet your father has a full set of balls in there. Care to check on that?”

Harry tore off towards the shed leaving Tonks to follow along. She reached the shed as Harry was dragging a trunk out of it. He popped it open and spied the little cubby where the snitch was stored. He opened the doors and pulled the snitch out holding it in his hand waiting for the wings to open and take flight. As soon as the wings spread to their full width and fluttered once, a yellowish glow appeared and the snitch was pulled into the pitch.

Harry followed it with his eyes as it flew off as if nothing had happened to it. “What was that?”

“Not sure, maybe the field has a charm on it to keep the snitch inside the field of play. They use those kinds of things at the real matches to prevent the audience from interfering in the match by grabbing the snitch.”

“Well, you up for a friendly game of capture the snitch, Nymph?”

“Sure, Harry. What are the stakes?” Tonks asked as she mounted her broom.

“Stakes?” Harry gave her a coy look as he mounted his broom as well.

“Yeah, what do I get if I beat you?”

“Umm, what do you want?”

“How about...and hour of dancing?” Tonks smiled wide as Harry looked back appalled at her suggestion.

“Umm, anything else you want? Anything at all?”

“Nope, that is good enough for now. How about you?” Harry blushed and looked at the ground. “How about something you wouldn’t normally get, Harry.” He blushed even harder before he managed to gain control of it. “Oh, you must be thinking some really dirty things for you to have blushed so bad. What are they? You will never know if I am willing to do them unless you tell me.”

Harry sputtered before giving his choice. “You teach me how to drive one of the cars in the garage.”

“Is that all?” Tonks asked her smile dropping in disappointment. “I was actually looking forward to your other ideas. Oh well, maybe next time.” Tonks smirked again as Harry shifted on his broom. “And we are off.” Tonks flew onto the pitch and started searching for the snitch feverishly.

Harry joined the search and went in the opposite direction giving Tonks a chance at beating him. As the time passed, Harry ended up capturing the snitch after a short chase where Tonks didn’t stand a chance.

“Two out of three,” Tonks yelled from her position across the field. She flew over to Harry as he released the snitch. She came to a halt in front of him and pulled her shirt up enough to expose her breasts. She moved from side to side a few times before returning her shirt to its original place and took off.

Tonks lost again as Harry managed to refocus in time after her blatant attempt to shake his concentration and caught the snitch out from underneath her broom. He smiled as Tonks frowned when she knew that she really didn't have a chance at beating him.

"Must I play naked to beat you?"

"It might help," Harry replied as he raised his eyebrows and gave Tonks a lustful smirk.

"You would probably beat me anyway. Starkers or not, I am no match for your seeking abilities. Well, do you want that lesson now or not?"

"Sounds good to me." Harry returned the snitch to the trunk and moved it back to the shed before joining Tonks in a slow flight back to the house. When they flew past the stables, Jules ran after them causing Tonks to fly much faster in her return to the house. Brooms left in the kitchen, Harry and Tonks went into the garage and Harry selected the automobile he wanted to drive. Tonks laughed but waved him on as he opened the door.

"Now, this is much like the motorbike only you have the pedals and steering wheel. You still have to feather the gas and clutch to keep the shifting smooth, but I doubt that you could kill this auto unless you really tried. It has more than enough power to handle poor shifting."

After a short tutorial on how the mechanics of the auto worked, Harry backed out of the garage slowly. He was about to put the car into drive when a shadow came over his window. Jules was looking into the auto more intently than ever.

Harry lowered the window and told Jules it was okay. Only after repeated calls did Jules settle herself in front of the open garage door. Harry drove around the driveway a few times getting a feel for the steering, gas, and brake. Tonks suggested he drive around the grounds before they took to the road.

On the third go around the grounds, each faster than the previous, Harry caught sight of Paul hanging his head and shaking it. Harry wondered what was wrong, but when he saw the grass he was

kicking up in the rearview he knew the reason. Tonks laughed at him when Harry explained what he guessed what the problem was.

They left the grounds at a fairly nice clip traveling down the tree lined lane. Harry loved the vibrations he felt when he accelerated and made turns. "This is almost as good as flying, almost."

They made it to the end of the lane and Tonks directed him to take the right hand turn away from the village. Harry managed to adapt to the auto faster than he had to the motorbike. There was less to worry about and Tonks was in a better position to instruct him. As the sun crept lower in the horizon, Harry found a nice flat open stretch of road and opened it up. He was enjoying the freedom of driving with Tonks sitting next to him.

The flash of colored lights added illumination to the interior startling Harry. When he figured out what was going on, he noticed that a police vehicle was behind him and the flashing lights were slowly gaining. Harry looked down at the speedometer and his stomach fell. The gauge read one hundred and forty km. "Bloody hell. First time out and I am going to end up in lockup."

"Oh Harry, are you a wizard or not?" Tonks laughed as she drew her wand and laid it in her lap out of sight from the window. "Just relax and do what he tells you to do."

Harry took a few deep breaths and waited as the officer approached his window. A rap on the glass made Harry lower the window. "License and vehicle papers please."

Harry smiled nervously and turned to Tonks who had already opened the glove box and was looking for the papers. She found them and passed them to Harry who in turn handed them to the officer who looked them over.

"A little outdated aren't they?"

"This is the first time it has been out in years. Simply running it a bit to make sure everything is still in working order," Tonks provided with a smile.

"License, son?"

"Uh, well, you see..."

"Are you even old enough to have a license?" Asked the officer.

"Um, not exactly, but how was I doing?" Harry offered meekly.

"Aside from exceeding the posted by nearly double, not too bad. Alright, son, how about you step out of the vehicle and walk back with me. You know you won't get a license for awhile longer now. Couldn't wait a few more weeks?"

"Actually, I am not even sixteen yet."

"All the same, step out of the vehicle please."

"Um, officer, could I say something?"

"What is it Miss?"

"Obliviate," Tonks said raising her wand as the spell hit the officer causing him to look rather blank. "You never saw us. The roadway was empty for most of the night. Now return to your post and have a good night."

The officer returned to his vehicle and drove back the way he had come. "Handy thing, magic. Now if you are going to make a habit of muggle transportation, we should go to the DVLA and get you a license for autos and motorcycles. I can work it so you don't have to take the tests. Otherwise, we could see what Marcus could do for you. I am sure he has the ability to fix you up."

"Whatever is easiest, Nymph. Thanks by the way. I didn't know what to do."

"As odd as it sounds, that wasn't the first time I have had to do that. I am rather heavy with the foot as well. Now, we should get back home before it gets too dark. Learning in daylight is nothing compared to the dark."

“Okay.” Harry turned around and drove back home. He kept the speed at the posted mark and not a hair above. When they returned, Jules was waiting for them at the garage. She moved to allow them in only after Harry had lowered the window letting her to verify who they were.

The remainder of the night was spent on the couch or in bed enjoying each other’s company.

Sunday dawned with less fanfare as the sun was hidden behind numerous clouds that had moved in during the night. Tonks woke Harry by tweaking his nose and flicking his ears. Her laughter was muffled as Harry buried her face into a pillow. They wrestled for a bit until Harry had to get up and send a letter to someone.

Once Hedwig was called from her perch and saddled with his note, she flew off into the mass of haze towards someone who had something of his. Harry descended into the training room where Tonks was waiting.

“After every mission, we have a debriefing. We try to identify positives, negatives, and areas for improvement. We should discuss what happened at the Lovegoods.”

Harry described what he saw and his ideas for next time. He left out his concern for Tonks when telling about the future plans. Tonks listened and gave her own description of events. Once finished, Tonks smiled at him warmly.

“Now, you said that none of your spells hit the second guy. Why do you think that is?”

“I don’t know. He was good. He always seemed fast enough to get out of the way before they got to him.”

“Well, you were a ways away from him weren’t you? That only makes it easier for someone to defend. Even fast spells aren’t instantaneous. He could have been a really good dueler. That makes it easier as well. Were you Occluding your mind?”

“Ah, not really. I just kind of fought. Why?”

“Do you Occlude your mind from Horace in training?”

“Yes of course, or he will use it against me. Why?”

“Well, anyone can use it against you. Not everyone is an aggressive Occlumens. Some are passive ones. They can get a glimpse of the spell you are casting as you do it or they can predict your movements before you move. You always need to shield your mind. No matter where or when. My guess is that your guy used all of them against you and that is why you couldn't hit him.”

“Damn it! So I could have had him if I had only blocked my mind more? I stuffed it up again. Damn it all.”

“Now Harry,” Tonks laughed. “No harm done. Just remember it for next time. This is why we do this. It isn't a blame session. It is a learning technique that will only help you next time. Now, what are the plans for today?”

“I would like to see what is at the end of the north path. We could go flying again if you are up to it. I know you lost kind of bad yesterday so I am willing to give you another chance.”

“Oh ho, I am a charity case now, am I? I think not, Mr. Potter. No, sir. I can beat you without your pity just...not at seeking. Chasing, now I should be better at that.”

“Whatever you say, Nymphadora.”

“You are doubting and mocking me aren't you?”

“No Nymphadora.”

“Yes, you are.” Tonks jumped on him and hugged him tightly as Harry staggered around trying to find the balance point for the two of them. The laughter gave way to kissing as Harry maneuvered his way down the stairs.

On the path, Harry led the way to the north and deep into the trees. They walked for a time before coming to an elegant gate amidst the trees. Pushing it open, Harry stepped into a scene that both warmed

his heart and sent chills up his spine. White stones marked the graves of a few dozen people. Some of the stones were plain; some were adorned with scrollwork, while others had images or busts of phoenixes and griffins topping them. The stones were aligned in a spiral patterns starting in the center and spinning outward.

Harry looked around seeking and dreading the names chiseled into the stone. He began a trip around the site looking for the names of his parents. Half way around the clearing, he saw a stone reading 'James' and 'Lily' above two sets of dates. There was room to the right of the headstone for additional ones. Harry took a deep breath before he stepped forward to stand in front of the grave.

He read the names slowly as he absorbed their meaning. His parents were buried at his feet. The same ones who gave their lives so he could live; the same ones who were stolen from him years ago by a madman. His anger and pain swelled in him as he broke down into sobs.

"Mum?" Harry shuddered while dropping to his knees. "Dad?" Harry touched the letters that formed the names. He traced them with his long fingers as he said each letter softly. Harry remained on his knees as he cried for his lost childhood and all the love that he had never experienced.

"I am sorry that everything happened the way it did. I am sorry that it took me so long to get here. I..." He paused as he thought all the thoughts that swirled in his head. "I promise it won't be for nothing. I will do you proud. I will show you that I am worthy of living while you aren't anymore."

Harry rubbed at his eyes and looked at the white flowers that bloomed around the grave. Lilies surrounded the site and seemed to sparkle brighter than any that could be found in the world. Harry stared at them for a few minutes before looking back to see if Tonks had followed him.

She stood right behind him, tears trailing down her own cheeks, as she looked not at the headstone but at Harry. "I am so sorry, Harry. If I could make it better, I would."

Harry smiled sadly at her and grasped her hand pulling her down to him. He enveloped her in a hug and cried on her shoulder. He felt his anguish ebb and flow as they held each other. Once he felt that he had purged the worst of his feelings, Harry turned to look at the grave again.

“Mum, Dad, this is Nymphadora. She has been a close friend this summer. I would do whatever I had to do to keep her safe. I care about her. I hope you would approve.” Tonks rubbed his back and kissed his cheek brushing away the tears that remained.

“Do you want to be left alone for awhile Harry?”

“I, I don’t know. I want to sit here and talk to them, but that sounds silly. I want you to stay and share this with me, but I want to be alone too.”

“How about I go over to the bench and wait for you. I will be here, but not too close. Tell them whatever you want to tell them. Tell them about your life, your hopes, and your dreams. They are your parents; they will listen as all parents do.” Tonks stood and looked down at Harry. “Don’t hold anything back, Harry. They love you.” She kissed his lips before moving away to sit on the bench in the middle of the cemetery.

Harry turned back to the marker and moved into a more comfortable sitting position using the stone behind him as a back rest. “I hope my relative won’t mind. I should try to figure out who he is at some point.” Harry swallowed and focused on the present situation.

He thought about his life and all the good and bad things that had happened. Tonks words still rang in his ears as he began the process of telling his parents everything about his life. His hopes were few but determined. His dreams were frightening and joyous. He told them about his life and held nothing back. He poured his soul into his words as he spoke. He revealed fears that he had never voiced out loud before.

The whole time, he felt his parents watching and listening to him. He felt them embrace him when he needed it and cheer him on when he listed his accomplishments. He had never felt such an emotional

rollercoaster before. As he reached the here and now, Harry looked back at Tonks and saw that she was watching him wearing a look of concern and pride.

Harry smiled at her and received the same in return. He turned back to the grave and smiled before getting to his feet. He leaned down to kiss the headstone and whispered something softly to his mum and dad before standing up straight. He looked ahead, into the trees, and then into the sky. A lone tear rolled down his cheek as he turned around with purpose.

Tonks watched as Harry stood and kissed the stone of his parents. She couldn't help but cry for Harry. He had been through so much with so few to help. When he gazed off into nothing, Tonks looked at the names and whispered her own vow. *'With my life, I will protect your son. I care for him so much. He will survive this fight.'*

Tonks watched Harry turn and she felt his being focus on her. She stood and waited for him to join her at the bench. Harry strode towards her with determined steps as she watched.

"Nymph, thank you."

"For what, Harry?"

"For being you and being here. For being everything I needed and still do. I...do I have any of my childhood left now?"

"Oh Harry, I am not sure. You are still the same person that walked into this place."

"No, I am not. I am free of the fear, the self-doubt. I felt them listening to me. I felt them holding me. I felt my parents with me as I told them everything. I never would have gotten here without you, Nymph. I can't thank you enough for this."

"Just stick around, Harry. That will be enough thanks. And never give up."

"I don't think I know how to give up, Nymph. No matter how much I have wanted to, I could never do it. I..." Harry looked to the sides of

the cemetery. He puffed out a breath before kissing Tonks as passionately as he could manage. "Thank you, Nymphadora Tonks. From me and all the Potters, thank you." Harry held on to her as he left the cemetery. When they reached the grounds, Harry seemed to weaken and held on to Tonks for support.

"Harry?" Tonks asked with concern.

"I think I wore myself out. I am awfully tired right now. Maybe a little too much excitement for one day, huh?"

"My guess is that you have never opened yourself up like that before. Pretty draining isn't it?" Harry smiled weakly as he yawned. "How about you take a nap for a few hours? We have the meeting tonight and you need all the strength you can get for that."

"Oh, yeah, I guess I do. Well, maybe I should get back to the house then."

Tonks and Harry walked back to the house and up the stairs. Tonks settled Harry into the bed and rubbed his face until he fell asleep. Watching him snooze only endeared him to her more. *'With my life.'* Tonks lay down next to him and drifted off after setting her wand for the meeting time.

The vibration woke Harry before Tonks. He felt alert and ready for anything as he Summoned his glasses into his hand and put them on. He saw Tonks smiling lightly in her sleep which caused him to smile as well. With a deep breath, Harry nudged Tonks awake and found her gazing up at him.

"I was sleeping here, Harry. What's the big deal with waking me up?"

Seeing her squinting with laughter, Harry tickled her for her cheek. The sun was fading fast and it was beyond time to eat as his stomach told him loudly.

"Hungry much, Harry?"

"Actually, yes, I am hungry Nymph. Shall we see what there is to eat?"

After an elf-driven meal, Harry and Tonks waddled out of the house. "Remind me never to say that I am really hungry to those two again. Even Molly can't get me to eat that much."

"They didn't get you to eat that much; they forced you to eat that much. They know that you have been skipping meals and they made up for it. Now as long as I don't throw up before we leave, I only have to survive Apparating."

"Oh, I don't know if I can do it so soon after eating that much. Maybe we should walk to the gate before Apparating. It might be safer all around." Harry waited for Tonks to agree before they walked hand-in-hand to the gate with Jules close behind.

"Well, the park again I guess?"

"Yeah, that should be safest, Harry."

With a soft pop, Harry and Tonks appeared in the rundown park near Grimmauld Place. Harry fought the uneasy feeling in his stomach before he took a step. "Mental note for next time, wait longer before Apparating on a full stomach."

"You get used to it the more you do it," Tonks replied while looking a little green herself in the failing light.

"Follow your own advice much?"

"Not often, Harry." Tonks smirked as she put a hand on her stomach and held her place until the feeling passed. "Better, you?"

Harry closed his eyes and settled his mind while trying to do the same to his body. "Getting there."

With a gentle pull, Harry was uprooted and walked with Tonks to Number Twelve. As they climbed the steps, Harry cleared his mind and blocked it as well as he could. He knew a few people were going to look at him differently than they did before but that didn't matter. Since he had arrived at home, everything was going really well. He had never been happier. *'Come to think of it, I have never been sadder too. Nothing is ever easy when it involves me.'*

Tonks knocked on the door and it opened to reveal Molly. She smiled at Harry and hugged him lovingly while giving Tonks an evil stare. Harry noticed and whispered in her ear. "I care about her. I am happy."

Molly returned the gesture, "If you are sure, Harry. You know I want you to be happy, but couldn't you find someone closer to your age?"

"Could any of the women my age handle what I go through on a daily basis?"

Molly sighed and shook her head. "Only a couple that I know of, Harry." Molly turned and looked into the living room where a few voices could be heard over the others.

Harry recognized the twins, Ron, and Ginny's over the others. Molly offered her hand to Tonks in as diplomatically a way as possible. Tonks took it and whispered something in her ear. Molly reacted instantly by looking Tonks in the eyes. Harry watched Tonks smile and nod with determination. His adoptive mother gave Tonks a quick hug before ushering them into the living room with the others.

"Harry," called numerous people at the same time. He nodded to each of them in turn. Ginny presented Harry with a knowing look before purposefully looking in Tonks' direction. Harry gave her a pointed one in return. Ginny smiled and giggled from her spot between Molly and Hestia Jones. Her mother watched her actions closely.

Ron was about to pat Harry on the back and hand him a butterbeer when the twins knocked him out of the way. "Harry old chap," barked Fred.

"Wonderful to see you again," continued George.

"Gits," shouted Ron from the spot on the floor where he landed. "He is my friend; now clear out before you get hurt."

"Not now Ronniekins," Fred waved him off.

"We have a matter to discuss with Harry," George added, not missing a beat.

"Prats," Ron said as he got up off the floor only to see Harry escorted out of the room by the pair of brothers. "Bring him back in one piece."

The twins moved Harry into the hallway and cornered him as best they could. The identical, devilish smiles caused Harry pause. "Uh, what's this about, guys?"

"As if you don't know, Harry old chap," Fred replied.

"Ready to tell us yet?" George asked.

"Ready to tell you what?" Harry questioned not knowing what they meant.

"As if you forgot," Fred continued.

"We want to know," George finished.

"Know what?" Harry queried.

"He is playing thick dear brother."

"Quite. Maybe we should force some wheezes down his throat until he spills."

"I had a very full dinner," Harry offered quickly. "So I am not hungry right now."

"Maybe we could hang him upside down until he talks or sick."

"I know what we can do," George stated like he had the answer to the universe.

"Oh, but that would be cruel, brother of mine," Fred added.

"Perfect!" They said in unison.

"You guys are really frightening when you do that you know," Harry said in a bored tone.

“Yes, we know,” they chimed again. “It is a gift.”

“Yes, gift, right,” Harry offered in a doubtful tone. “Well, if you are done talking amongst yourselves, can I get back with the others?”

“Oh, don’t you wish to know what we plan to do?”

“Not really. I have no idea what you are talking about in the first place.”

“Three weeks and his mind has gone to seed,” Fred stated sadly.

“Memory is shoddy too. What a loss and at such a young age.”

“Nutters, both of you,” Harry said.

“Who is she?”

“Who is who?”

“The bird that marked you all up last time,” Fred asked with interest.

“We asked and you dodged the question,” George included.

“Now, we aren’t playing nice anymore,” Fred smirked.

“Tell us or we will unleash our wrath,” George said with all the flair of a salesman.

“And just what exactly does your wrath entail?”

“The worst horror imaginable, Harry,” Fred said leading into the climatic truth.

“Our sister,” both twins finished with an evil smirk covering their own shudders.

Harry couldn’t help but laugh. He looked into each of their faces before bursting. He laughed deep belly laughs as he pointed at each of their shocked faces. “Ginny is supposed to scare me into telling you two?”

"Yeah," Fred said not understanding how Harry could be so flippant about it.

"She can be downright sadistic when she wants to," George countered.

"You don't know her like we do," they said together. "She will find out and you will beg us to call her off."

Harry continued to laugh and had to grab onto the wall to keep from falling over. Every time he caught sight of their expressions he would lose it even more. The twins fixed him with identical looks of dismay. They couldn't see the humour in the matter at all.

"Oh, that is the best laugh I have had in months, thanks guys."

"You don't understand, Harry, she will find out."

"Don't throw away your life like this."

"Tell us and we can save you," they chimed.

Harry calmed his mind as much as he could before shaking his head and splitting the pair when he walked back into the living room. Many in the room looked at him with questioning stares. "What?"

"What caught your fancy so much that you can barely walk straight?" Ginny asked.

"The twins threatened me," Harry answered while fighting another bout of laughter.

"And what did they threaten you with that was so funny?" Molly asked eyeing the pair as they entered the room completely confused. Harry could only point at Ginny who became even more perplexed. She looked at the twins demanding an answer by her glare.

"Fine, he made this happen," the twins rationalised. "He won't tell us who his lady friend is."

Ginny worked it out as she watched Harry stifle his laughter. "So you threatened him with me?"

"Of course, Gin-gin. You can find out anything you want to."

"Well, that would work if I didn't already know," Ginny offered lightly. "You two are really behind the times aren't you? Taking after Ron I see."

She earned herself three reproachful remarks. Ron's taking offense at the comparison being made and the twins' showing hurt that she hadn't confided the truth in them.

"Who is it, Gin?"

"We can make you talk."

"Yeah, you and which army?" Ginny squared her shoulders and stared the twins down.

"Bloody hell, when did we loose our partner in crime?"

"When I started my own group," Ginny answered. "I figured it out. No one told me a thing."

"Harry," Remus spoke from the chair near the fireplace. "You have a girlfriend?"

Harry shrugged a little before looking at the floor. "I guess so. We haven't really discussed the finer points of it."

"Yeah, too busy shagging all night long, eh Harry?" The twins asked earning a smack upside the head from their mother who had left the couch to assume a position behind her sons.

"My boys do not talk like that," Molly shouted before moving back to the couch. "Especially not in mixed company."

Harry smirked until he met Remus' eyes. The man looked lost with a slight far off look to him. "Remus?"

"Sorry, Harry," Remus said smiling all the same. "It just takes me back to when Sirius and James would try to worm girls' names from each other. Sirius couldn't help but brag. James always protected his. You wouldn't happen to have taken after Sirius would you?"

Harry shook his head. "Not a chance, Remus."

"If we guess who it is, will you tell us?" The twins asked.

"No, I wouldn't."

"Cho?" "Susan Bones?" "Alicia?" Both got an evil look on their faces, "Hermione?" Harry scowled at them as he glanced at Ron who was paying close attention to the conversation. "Luna?"

"Yes, did someone call?" Luna asked as she emerged from the hallway. "Did I miss something? Oh, hello Harry."

"Luna," Harry greeted welcoming a change of subject. "So, ah, are you in the Order then?"

"What?" She said airily. "No, my father is."

"Harry," Odd said as he joined the others in the room followed by Minerva and Filius. "Pleasure to meet you again. We had a spot of trouble and the fine folks here invited me to join them. Such nice people."

"Yes they are at most times," Harry relented. "A spot of trouble? So that means that the Death Eaters are after you?" Harry did his best to play dumb.

"It would seem so, but I wouldn't change a thing, Harry," Odd's face lit up. "I love the secret places and sneaking around stuff. Reminds me of my school days."

"Yes, well, it can be fun at times," Harry admitted as he caught a few forced grins among his friends.

"Did we interrupt anything of importance, Arthur?" Minerva asked noticing the group dynamic of the room. Harry was next to Molly,

Ginny and Tonks while the twins and Remus had taken up the opposite side. Ron was in the middle along with his father and Bill while Luna and her father remained in the doorway.

"No Professor, nothing important," Harry quickly intervened as the chatter resumed.

Minerva caught Molly's eyes and followed it to Tonks who was keeping a close watch on Harry the entire time. Both of the women noticed that her hand was on her wand at all times. They shared a look before Minerva mixed with the others that seemed to arrive in a steady stream.

Conversation flowed easily as Harry watched everyone and joined in from time to time. He spent time with Ron reassuring him that he didn't tell Ginny anything about his girlfriend. Ron believed Harry when he said that she had figured it out and confronted him with it.

"Always a nosey one she is," Ron stated as if it was common knowledge. Unfortunately for him, Ginny was within ear shot and smacked him for it. "Oi, it is the truth you know."

"Yes, but you don't have to announce it to the room, Ron," Ginny huffed.

"Touched, I tell you," Ron quipped earning another smack from his sister. He hit her in the head with a throw pillow as retaliation. She glared at him and mimicked slitting his throat with her finger. Ron laughed it off as he and Harry continued chatting about anything that crossed their minds. Quidditch was a popular subject and one that all of the Weasley men added their two pence worth.

The last group of people to arrive consisted of Snape, Dumbledore, Hagrid, and Dung. Mad Eye had shown up at some point during the conversation but no one had noticed him until Dumbledore called the meeting to order. As Harry joined the others waiting to get into the kitchen, Mad Eye gave him a look of warning.

Harry took it to heart and tried to improve his mental shields before he entered the room. Tonks stood right behind Harry and patted his back as they bunched up in the hallway.

Harry gave a quick look over his shoulder and smiled at Ron, Ginny, and Luna who remained in the living room. He entered the kitchen and found a place next to Tonks and Minerva against the wall. He caught the disapproving look from his professor and returned it with a smile before settling in to a comfortable pose.

“Friends,” Albus spoke with a strong voice, “let this meeting begin. But before we get into plans and strategy, let us welcome Odd Lovegood into our number. The reason of which will be discussed later.”

Odd accepted everyone’s well wishes and smiled at the concerned looks. Harry and Tonks followed the lead of the majority of the Order in greeting him. Odd made a particularly visible gesture by shaking Harry’s hand and thanking him for trusting his magazine to print the truth.

“Yes, welcome,” Albus offered before changing his mood. “We should get on with the meeting now. First off, Kingsley, how is the new position working out?”

“I am busy every minute of the day, Albus,” Kingsley said looking a little worn. “I am not sure how Amelia did all of it, but I am trying to keep up.”

“She was particularly skilled in her time management if I remember correctly,” Albus offered as a reason behind Kingsley’s overwhelmed attitude. “Any news to report?”

“I can say that recruitment is starting to pick up,” Kingsley began. “We are moving to increase pay and accelerate training. It helps to have a pro-auror minister. I have retasked many of our personnel from the stupid assignments Fudge had ordered them to be put on. Amelia had tried to cancel their assignments, but Fudge had refused to allow it.”

“No more monitoring of the known werewolves, then,” Tonks asked with hope.

“Thankfully, no, Tonks,” Kingsley replied. “We are working out the details with the goblins on tracking the finances of the known Death

Eaters. This never would have been possible with Fudge in office, but we are finding Ragnok to be most accommodating with us.”

“Ragnok is helping you out?” Harry asked. “Well, at least Gringotts is on our side at least to a point.”

“Harry,” Albus interjected. “Ragnok is the not only the head of Gringotts, but he is the leader of the goblins as well. You made a rather well connected friend in him.”

Harry allowed his surprise to show on his face as he looked from Albus to Kingsley to Tonks. “You never asked and I didn’t want to change how you interacted with him. You were genuine and he seemed to respond well to that,” Tonks offered as an excuse.

“Ragnok made it very clear,” Kingsley continued, “that the only reason he was willing to work with us was because of you, Harry. You believed in Amelia and her abilities so he offered to help us. Of course we had to agree to give them certain rights that they hadn’t had for many years, but the Minister didn’t even hesitate in agreeing to their terms.”

Harry smiled in a confused way as he asked what rights they had been given. “Representation in the Ministry separate from the liaison office,” Kingsley ticked off his fingers counting them out. “Direct negotiation rights with foreign governments on business deals with taxability by the Ministry, naturally. A non-voting seat in the cabinet and a few other things they had wanted for years. All-in-all, they made out rather well, but I wouldn’t expect less from them.”

“Wow,” Harry said. “Good for them then. I am glad Ragnok was able to help his people out. Why haven’t we heard about it in the newspaper?”

Quite a few of the people in the room nodded in agreement with the question. Apparently, the information wasn’t common knowledge as only Albus, Minerva, and Kingsley seemed to know it.

“The goblins are more than happy to keep the details secret for now,” Kingsley explained. “They know how the majority of the Wizarding world views them. They understand that discretion was essential in

the deal going through. Once they have proven that they are doing what is best for everyone, and not just themselves, both sides will allow the specifics to leak. Public support is crucial right now and the Ministry can't afford to lose what few old families they have on their side. Allowing non-humans this level of equality and autonomy would most likely force them over to *'His'* side. I was never one for politics, but I seem to have little choice in the matter now."

"An amazing improvement in their situation," Albus added. "You should be pleased with how things worked out, Harry. Your circle of friends seems to have grown as of late."

"Yeah, well, I really never planned on any of this happening," Harry admitted. *'I just wanted to be in charge of my own life and everything else sort of happened.'*

"I know that we are expecting their results later this week," Kingsley said. "They were going to compare all of the accounts and see who, if anyone, they had in common. They wouldn't let any of us look at the records. Said it was a violation of their customers' privacy or something or other. Anyway, most of my time has been spent organizing watches and coordinating contingency plans should certain events transpire. Rather tedious work but it must be done."

"Invaluable work, Kingsley, I am sure," Albus congratulated. "In addition, I would like to thank Harry for assisting in the removal of the former Minister. You made much of the last week possible. Thank you."

Harry nodded his acceptance and watched as Dumbledore received it with a genuine smile. "I did what needed done, and thank you Mr. Diggory for offering her name. You too, Professor, you are the one who really made it possible."

"You're welcome, Harry," Amos said from his spot next to Hagrid. "I did it for my son and the rest of us." He frowned but his smile returned with the steely glint of resolve.

"You are welcome, Harry," Albus offered amiably. "Now is not the time to remain neutral for the sake of keeping a distance from something you wish to stay out of. Maybe I should have voiced my

opinion years ago, but I can change nothing now. We can only move forward and learn from the past.”

Harry thought over what Dumbledore had said. He read between the lines and figured that Albus had taken a wait-and-see approach when Fudge had been elected the first time. Harry guessed that the wind had changed at the recall and it was the only time that Dumbledore had been forced into a situation by others. He knew how the Headmaster worked. He knew that an opportunity had presented itself and the old man had to make a choice. Harry smirked in as friendly of a way as he could.

“Now, Hagrid,” Albus redirected the meeting. “You have been hearing things among the forest inhabitants. Please explain.”

Hagrid described in as clear a way as he could what he had been hearing. The goblins had apparently been sharing their new found faith in the Ministry with other beings and beasts. He explained that the centaurs were “watchin’ tha stars or some ruddy thing.” The rumours about vampire covens joining the Dark Lord had been exaggerated. It seemed that a few of the British ones were in the beginning stages of talks with the Ministry now that it appeared they could at least be heard out and not killed on sight.

Lupin was next and detailed what he had been hearing amongst the werewolves that he knew. The more violent and aggressive members of the werewolf community had joined the dark side almost immediately, but the more hopeful members had decided to lay low until there was reason to speak out. It seemed that Amelia had contacted a few of the better known members and offered to speak with them in hopes of at least achieving an arrangement of sorts. Lupin expressed his joy for the possibilities that were open to others afflicted with his disease.

Elphias Doge gave a quick report on what he had been hearing in his circle of friends. Tonks had murmured “retired farts” forcing Harry to stifle a laugh. Once he controlled himself, he poked Tonks in the side for her joke. She finished the fight with an errant stretch that caused her elbow to glance his head sharply. Only Minerva had caught the

entire exchange and was forced to look away from the two to avoid attracting additional attention to them.

Emmeline Vance provided the same sort of report only from her circle of friends. She mentioned certain high society functions and suggested that many were scared of what a new war would do to their lives. She hinted that Harry should join her at the functions as his fame and current political position would loosen many people's lips and open their minds. Harry declined the offer almost as fast as he could.

Others gave their reports and added tidbits of info here and there. Harry forced himself to pay attention even though his mind started to drift. He was waiting for Snape's report. He wanted to know who the others had been at the Lovegoods. The moment came and Albus cleared his throat.

"We are joined by Odd due to a recent incident," Albus spoke solemnly. "Death Eaters planned to attack his home but were stopped prior to causing any damage or threatening him and his daughter. I understand that there were others involved but I have yet to hear who they were."

"Professor Dumbledore," Odd began, "I believe there were three Death Eaters on our property obviously planning to make an example out of us. I know that one was caught, but the other two got away. There were two other people there, but they don't exist if you get my meaning."

"Honestly," Snape snapped. "Do you expect us to believe that 'they' had people watching you? Why would they bother?"

"I have voiced opinions most don't want to hear," Odd defended. "Maybe they were investigating us. Could have been tracking us. I really don't care at this point. They were there and saved our lives."

Snape wore a disbelieving scowl. "Am I correct in understanding that there were Unspeakables at your home?" Albus asked with a great amount of interest.

Odd didn't confirm the assumption but wavered in his denial enough to get the point across. Many in the room seemed to take sides one way or the other on the matter. Some completely doubted their existence while others found it to be logical. A handful of members remained quiet and Harry was included in that group.

"Please," Albus announced, "may we have some decorum? Kingsley, can you confirm Odd's account of events?"

"I can neither confirm nor deny anything related to the department of which you speak," Kingsley said formally. "My secrecy oaths prevent me from saying anything about the matter."

"We all know that they research stuff," Dedalus Diggle shouted over the crowd.

"Yes, but the rumours about the 'other' group have never been proven," Hestia countered. "All we know are the stories whispered after one too many drinks have been consumed."

"Alastor?" Albus queried.

"I have seen things I can't talk about, Albus," Alastor replied. "But I do know that if you get enough stories together you usually find some truth to them." The room seemed to fall quiet at the statement.

"So it would appear that another faction has joined the fight then," Albus puzzled out loud. "Maybe Amelia is more willing to utilize her resources than Fudge was comfortable doing so. Severus, I believe that your report will shed more light on this matter."

Snape nodded curtly and assumed his superior posture as he began listing what was going on inside Voldemort's circle. "The Dark Lord has recovered fully. He has already killed two people one of them being a Death Eater. He sent three after the Lovegoods. Your willingness to print Potter's words has made you targets."

"I would do it again," Odd told Harry directly. "I seem to be doing something right." He chuckled softly.

"It takes all kinds," Snape retorted snidely. "The captured one was new and knows nothing of consequence. The others were tortured at length for their failure. He is under the impression that the Headmaster had people guarding the Lovegoods. It was reported that there were five or six people defending the Lovegood home. He will send more on subsequent attacks to prevent future failures. A small 'victory' for our side may carry future costs higher than previously possible."

"Severus," Albus interjected, "ever the bright ray of sun shine you are. The future has not happened and was never set in place. Two people are alive and Voldemort has lost one of his number to people we know little about. It is a victory that we would have lost had it not been for them."

Snape begrudgingly acquiesced to Dumbledore before continuing. "Plans are being made for other attacks as well as recruiting and a possible release of those captured at the Ministry. There is only a handful of active Death Eaters right now, maybe twenty or so, but I expect the number to increase rapidly now that he is publicly known to exist again. I expect Potter to be at the top of the list of targets."

"No surprise there," Harry answered evenly.

"Now let us not speculate, Severus," Albus chided. "What do we know about his plans?"

"Little, as I have not proven my loyalty as of yet."

"And how would you do that, Snape?" Harry asked directly. He knew there was something not being said by Snape but he couldn't figure out what it was.

"Care to accompany me to the next meeting Potter?" Snape shot back venomously.

"No thanks," Harry answered. "Voldemort and I aren't all that friendly at the moment, and I have been shown his hospitality before. I don't suggest it to anyone. Kind of hurts for awhile, doesn't it, Snape." Harry was met with a scowl that rivaled all others. He smirked back in response.

"Gentlemen," Albus cut in. "Not again. Do you two need a quiet room to resolve your differences?"

"Wouldn't be quiet for long, Professor," Harry answered.

"If I wouldn't be held responsible for my actions, Headmaster," Snape offered, "I would accept the opportunity."

"You wish," Harry added before Dumbledore raised his hands and sighed deeply.

"Just like before, no room for compromise," Albus shook his head. "Back on task, Severus, if you please."

"I get the impression that future incidents are going to be more personal for the Dark Lord," Snape continued while staring Harry down. "If I had to guess, it would be a settling of scores or revenge. He seems to be looking forward to them, but I have not been told of their targets or goals."

"Thank you, Severus, your efforts are appreciated," Albus thanked him. "Now, our final bit of business for the evening. The entire Order is not needed for this. I ask that Harry and Tonks remain with those previously identified."

The room started to break up but Harry stopped them before anyone left the room. "I ask that the Order remain. Anything you have to say to me can be done in front of the others. You will not leave others in the dark. That backfired once before." Harry looked into Albus' eyes and waited for him to agree.

"If you are sure, Harry," the old man relented. "You all may stay but please do not interrupt." Once everyone had resumed their places he looked from Tonks to Harry. "Harry, I have heard that you have not left Privet Drive for a few days. Is there something wrong I should know about?"

Harry stopped his smirk from showing as he answered. "Nothing that hasn't already been shared, Professor. Maybe if you are clearer in your question I might be able to help you out."

“As you wish, Harry. Have you left Privet Drive in the last week?”

“Nope.”

“And why not?” Albus asked knowing the spectacle they were offering for the Order.

“There has been no reason for me to leave Privet Drive.”

“And why is that?”

Harry laughed once before answering. “Because I am not living there any more.”

Many of the members started asking questions of all kinds. Albus watched who remained quiet and made a mental note of it. “And why do you not live there any more, Harry?”

“Vernon went too far and I had had enough,” Harry replied.

“Fool,” Snape added. “The Dark Lord will find you now.”

“The chances of him finding me are less now than they were before, Snivellus,” Harry countered. “You knew where I was before and now you do not.”

Snape’s eyes burned as he restrained himself from grabbing Harry and throwing him up against the wall.

“Harry, where are you living now?” Albus asked.

“Can’t tell you,” Harry told the room without remorse. “Only two people here know where I am living and neither can tell anyone where it is.”

“And who else knows, Harry?” Molly asked in a motherly tone that bordered on panic.

Harry looked to Tonks and smiled. “Since I come to these things with Tonks, she is obviously one of them. The other person doesn’t know he knows.” Harry scanned the room and smiled at the anxious faces.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out an item he had stowed there before leaving the house.

For the first time since he had entered, Harry moved away from the wall and made his way to Remus. He set the item in front of the weary man and smiled sadly. "Thank you, Remus."

The werewolf look down at the table and saw the stuffed wolf he had given Harry the day he had left St. Mungo's. The wolf had a patch of abused fur on his back and one ear had been nibbled on. "I gave you this..."

"I know," Harry answered. "I found it when I moved home. Thank you."

"Home, you mean Godric's Hollow?" Albus asked trying to figure out how Harry could live in a destroyed house.

"No," Harry corrected. "Home, my family home. You know where it is, Remus, but you can't tell anyone because of the charms and wards. You can't go back because I haven't keyed you into the wards yet. I am back where I belong. I have the other ones too," Harry said pointing at the stuffed wolf.

Remus held the toy in his hand as a lone tear slipped from the corner of his eye. He closed his eyes and Harry knew he was remembering the past. The last friend of his parents held the animal out to him to take back. Harry took it gladly and returned it to his pocket. "I would be willing to invite you over if you want."

"I would like that, Harry, thank you." Remus smiled and grew quiet as others around him asked question after question.

"Harry, you are not safe there," Albus said above the noise ending all other conversations. "That is why your parents left in the first place."

"Actually, they left because my home's location has been secret for hundreds of years. They were afraid that Voldemort was going to find it."

"And how is it different now?"

"I am the only one left," Harry replied. "If I die, the house will never be found. Only a blood member of the Potter's can use the home. Kind of a waste if I don't live there. It is such a beautiful place too. I am more than safe and there are no Dursleys' to try and kill me."

"Now, Harry, it isn't that bad," Albus said as three people stopped themselves from arguing or speaking instantly.

"Actually, it is worse than you understand," Harry informed him. "But that is no longer a concern since I am free of them. And I assure you I am safe where I am. There is more than Tonks to keep me safe."

"Such as," Albus prompted.

Harry weighed his choices before answering. "There are five people, or thereabouts, at home. I would say that at least three would help defend my home."

"I am sure the other two would help, Harry," Tonks said. "You know they would."

"Fine," Harry relented, "there are five people then. Now, why are you so concerned about where I live? I thought we agreed that I was in control of my own life."

"You decided Harry, not us," Albus said. "We are supposed to be keeping you safe. That is one of our primary functions."

"Well, don't worry about it," Harry waved off his concern. "I have the matter well in hand. Use the people for more important things like keeping the Weasleys, Lovegoods, Longbottoms, and Grangers safe. If Voldemort plans to get revenge, I would guess my closest friends are on the list."

"We are working on keeping them safe, Harry, but I am more concerned about you at this point. You are welcome to move in here and stay, but you can't stay where we can't find you."

Harry set his face before responding. "I am not sure when you thought this became a debate, Professor. I live where I want to and I

chose to stay where I am. I kind of like being able to go outside and not worry about being followed.”

“Speak for yourself, Harry,” Tonks mumbled.

“Well, she doesn’t count.”

“Easy for you to say, but it is completely different for me.”

“That is true,” Harry laughed at Tonks distress.

“Just wait until we get home,” Tonks grumbled completely ignoring Minerva and Molly’s looks.

“It doesn’t sound safe to me, Harry,” Albus commented while gesturing to Tonks.

“We are fine, just one of us is hassled a little more than the other.” Harry couldn’t help but smile at Tonks as she mumbled about crazy animals. “Nothing you say is going to change where I live, Professor. It is not open for discussion. You are the reason I didn’t live there, earlier, as I was supposed to.”

“What do you mean, Harry?” Albus asked.

“My parents wishes” Harry replied. “You ignored them when you knew they existed. You refused to abide by them when you knew they had written them out.” Harry took a breath and calmed down. “You lost the ability to make decisions for my life. I make them now. If I need help, I will ask those I trust and who have my best interests in mind.”

Albus watched as Harry remained in complete control over himself. He paused when he needed to collect his thoughts before they broke free of his mental shields. The professor was most pleased with the amount of progress Harry had made in a few short weeks. He guessed that Tonks had been helping Harry with his Occlumency skills.

Harry looked on as Albus watched him. He did his best to will Albus to let him be. He wasn’t in the mood to fight about his home, secret

job, or his personal time with Tonks. His life might not be normal, but it was all he had at the moment.

"I do not like it, Harry," Albus conceded, "but I see that you are adamant about this. I object to the situation, out of concern for your safety, but I will allow you to make this choice for yourself."

Harry smiled but shook his head. "You are allowing nothing, Professor. I am responsible for myself and those who live with me." Albus didn't argue the matter any further and simply nodded his head once in acceptance.

As a few members of the Order discussed various things between themselves, Harry felt a slight tug at his mind. It felt vaguely familiar but he couldn't place it. He tried to figure out if it was Voldemort trying to plant things in his mind again or if it was someone else poking around. After a few minutes, Harry felt confident that it wasn't Voldemort since his scar wasn't causing him any pain.

He scanned the room trying to identify the source of the attack without alerting the person by making a scene. He saw Molly watching him with a very concerned look on her face. Harry could see that she wanted to pull him into another room and lecture him on disrespecting the Headmaster and about his relationship with Tonks. He found Minerva giving him sideways glances from time to time. Her rigid posture held as she gave him telling looks of disapproval.

He continued looking around the room trying to find the guilty party if they were present. He saw a few others watching him, but they seemed more confused or worried than probing. As his gaze neared the last area of the kitchen, Harry felt the feeling fade.

He wasn't sure whether it disappeared because he was looking or if he was just imagining things. Harry felt Tonks standing close to him and allowed his anxiousness to subside. He didn't see anyone staring at him that appeared to have an improper motive. He put his worries away for later to be figured out as the meeting came to a close.

Being close to the door, he and Tonks filtered into the queue and left the kitchen for the living room. They found Ginny and Luna talking about girly things while Ron simply waited patiently for someone else

to arrive. Harry caught a bit of hesitation from his best friend, but it passed quickly.

“Hey, mate,” Ron said plainly. “Come to save me from these two?”

“Torturing you, are they?” Harry asked with a smile.

“Non-stop babble about blokes, clothes, and creatures I have never heard of.” Ron gave a quick look at Luna on the last to emphasize his point. Harry nodded as he held back his snort.

Tonks sat next to Harry and watched everyone leave or mill around the house speaking in hushed conversations. She kept a safe distance from Harry as not to arouse any suspicions but was close enough to keep up appearances. Everyone knew she was basically Harry’s personal protector. As more people left, the movement lessened in the house giving Tonks a chance to join in some of the conversations between Harry and his friends.

“So,” Ginny prompted, “what is with everyone?” She pointed to the people who kept giving Harry odds looks. “Everything okay, Harry?”

“For me, yes, it is,” Harry answered. “Most people just don’t seem to agree.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I left Privet Drive last week. My uncle went too far. I couldn’t take it anymore.”

“You did?” Ron asked with slight amazement. “Where you living now? I am sure mum would let you stay with us.”

“I am living at the home I was meant to live in. I found out that it existed during a visit to Gringotts. I learned all sorts of things then. Anyway, it is where my family lived before they moved to Godric’s Hollow. They didn’t want to risk Voldemort finding it. Now, it would just go to waste if I didn’t live there. This way, no one is a bigger target because I am living there. I guess most of them just think of me as a little kid who needs taken care of. I think I am doing pretty well so far.”

"You are doing just fine, Harry," Tonks added. "Tell them about your find the other day. The fun one."

"Oh," Harry looked at Ginny and Ron. "I have a Quidditch pitch. No stands or anything but there are goals and a boundary line. I have a full set of balls too. We think the snitch is charmed to keep it from flying off since it was pulled into the field of play by some kind of spell. We played a bit the other day. It was brilliant."

"You really have your own pitch?" Ron asked not hiding any of his surprise. "Can we come play some time? It would be great."

"Sure," Harry said with a genuine smile. "I would need to figure out how to get all of you there, but I'm sure we could manage it. Give me some time."

"Are you going to be back on the team this year?" Luna asked during one of her more lucid moments.

"I am not sure, but I hope so." Harry looked up to see Minerva coming to a stop next to him.

"Mr. Potter," she said formally. "I believe you requested this earlier today." She held out his Firebolt waiting for him to take it which he did without a second's hesitation.

"Thank you, Professor," Harry offered. "Ever since I found the pitch, I have been missing it dreadfully."

"Your own pitch?" She asked as she inclined head. "That answers an age old question of mine that your father refused to give me. He always improved far more over the summer than many other students did. I always asked him how, but he would cheekily refuse to answer the question. Now I know at least."

"Sorry, dad," Harry mumbled quietly but loud enough for everyone to hear. Minerva smirked in response.

"You are your father's son, no doubt," she said. "And yes, you will be back on the team, Mr. Potter. It was rather easy to lift the ban that,

woman, placed on you. Only one staff member opposed it, but there was no surprise there.”

“Snape just couldn’t help him self,” Ron snapped earning him a reproachful glare.

“Professor Snape,” Minerva corrected. “No he couldn’t. I think he is tired of losing every year. I, on the other hand, have grown used to winning every year and reminding him of it every chance I get.” Minerva said the last in a hushed tone while her lips almost curled into a smile. “Keep practicing.”

Minerva gave everyone her normal, penetrating look before leaving the house. Harry held on to his broom tightly as the conversation continued on around him. Ron was telling Ginny that she should start practicing the Chaser position since Harry would be Seeker again. Tonks watched Harry for a few minutes before nudging him back to reality.

“What you thinking about?” Tonks asked.

“Flying, my friends, and the fact that you don’t stand a chance of beating me now.” Harry smirked at her as she smacked him in the arm.

“I could do what I threatened to do.” Tonks was the one smirking as Harry went quiet and shifted a little in place. “What is wrong?”

“Nothing at all,” Harry said trying to rid his mind of the images that dominated it. Try as he did, he couldn’t get the picture of a naked Tonks on a broom out of his mind. Harry spent the next few minutes avoiding looking over his shoulder at Tonks.

Molly entered the room and told Ron and Ginny that they needed to get back home. She waved a portkey at them telling them that they were returning the same way they had come. Ginny hopped off the couch and gave Harry a quick hug goodbye before waving to Tonks and joining her mother.

Ron tapped Harry on the shoulder and led him over to a corner of the room. Not sure what was going on, Harry raised his eyebrows in

askance. "Your girlfriend isn't Hermione, is it?" Ron was completely serious as he asked.

"No, Ron, Hermione is not my girlfriend. Why do you think she would be?"

"Because you and her have always gotten on so well."

"As friends, Ron, only as friends. She is a great friend, but I don't think there is anything else to it. Besides, she is a little too nagging for my tastes."

"Oh," Ron waved him off, "that is just how she shows she cares. You know, just like mum."

"Thought about it much?" Harry asked giving Ron a knowing smirk as he squirmed a little before becoming more aloof.

"Not really, it is just with Ginny knowing who it is and all, I didn't know why you never told me is all."

"Ginny figured it out and confronted me about it. I hadn't planned on anyone finding out for at least awhile, but there she was with her hands on her hips knowing everything."

"She has a tendency of doing that," Ron admitted. "Annoying it is and a little frightening too. Looks like mum when she does it. So do I know her or is she some muggle you know?"

"I will tell later, okay, mate. I would rather keep her unknown until we figure out if it is going somewhere. No sense in endangering her life more than it already is, eh?"

"Fine, keep your secrets, Harry. I see how you are. Tell your best mate's sister but not your best mate." Ron smiled as he finished. "She is a troll of a Slytherin isn't she? Too hideous to name out loud. That or she is made up. You would figure with your fame you could land a decent looking bird, but I guess not everyone is that easy. Of course, you could bugger up a simple thing like getting a girl."

“Watch it, you,” Harry warned Ron matching his humorous tone. Ron smacked him on the back before joining his sister, brothers, father, and mother for the journey home. Ginny gave him a knowing look before the portkey activated and whisked the family away.

Harry saw Tonks speaking to Albus in the doorway and it appeared to be a very intense conversation judging by the way his beard moved as he talked. The normally soft spoken wizard was more animated in his speech and his hands were clasped in front of him as if stopping them from moving about as he spoke. Harry moved to join them and try to prevent anything bad from happening when Moody stomped up to him.

“Best to leave them be for a time, Potter,” Mad Eye told him. “She is a big girl and can take care of herself. You set a few on their ears tonight and The Headmaster is one of them. He didn’t expect you to move out without his knowing about it first.”

“Is he mad that I am not one of his pawns anymore?”

“He seems to be frustrated at himself more than anything. He knows that he is the cause of the problems between you, but I do not know what they are,” Moody explained as Harry studied him carefully. “I only know that the man carries some guilt with him. I have known him for many years so I see it where others don’t. So much is happening now and Albus isn’t on top of all of it like he wants. He was used two years ago and he couldn’t figure it out how to stop it. Last year, he was outmaneuvered by ‘Him’ and he lost your trust. I think that bothers him the most.”

“It would have been easy to avoid losing my trust. All he had to do was tell me what was going on.”

“Looking back, it is easy to see the wrong choices, but in the moment it isn’t. Between us, I think he got too close and that prevented him from being as objective as he should have been. He cares about you and he wanted you to have as normal a life as possible.”

“My life has never been normal and it will never be normal. When is everyone going to realize that and start letting me live what ever kind of life I am stuck with?”

“We all know now.” Reading Harry’s look he clarified. “Including Dumbledore. I don’t think he will hold anything back from you just because he is trying to protect you from learning something terrible. He didn’t tell me what it was that caused the problem, but even that old dog can learn new tricks albeit slower than you seem able to.”

“If it involves me, I want to know what is going on.” Harry took a breath and watched as Albus nodded to Tonks and left the house. “I may not know what to do with the information, but at least I have it to think about. If you told Hermione everything that was going on I am sure she could give you a few ideas.”

Moody barked a laugh and patted Harry’s shoulder. “I don’t doubt she would, smart girl that she is. Keep your eyes open and your head down, Potter. Something tells me you have a purpose in life that is more than the average person.” Moody walked away as Tonks met up with Harry.

“Miss me?” She asked sighing with relief.

“Yes,” Harry answered with a concerned smile. “Anything you want to tell me?”

Tonks looked at him and sighed again. “When we get home?”

Harry saw her weary state and nodded in agreement much to her relief. Harry gathered his broom and followed Tonks out of the house and to the park. With a quick look around, they Apparated home. As Tonks dodged Jules using Harry as her barrier, they made it inside the house and Harry laid his broom on the couch only to have Tiki pop into the room and pop out taking the broom with her.

“Apparently, it doesn’t go there,” Harry said with a slightly puzzled look wondering where Tiki took his broom.

“Master only in name I guess,” Tonks joked as Harry turned around and gave her an evil glare. “Oh, you couldn’t hate me if you tried, Harry.”

“Yeah, well, I am trying anyway.” Harry continued staring her down and fought the laughter as Tonks rotated her appearance. The pig’s

snout almost broke his resolve, but the long white hair she used to fashion a beard finally got Harry to break.

Tonks raised her arms in victory and started dancing in place only to be swept up in Harry's arms as he picked her up off the floor and headed towards the stairs. When she was tossed over his shoulder, she started giggling only to be tickled into a squirming mass of laughter. Harry deposited her onto the bed by throwing her in the air and followed close behind. Tonks wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him to her waiting lips.

The minutes passed and their clothing was hastily removed and flung around the room. As Harry hovered above Tonks heaving chest, he looked into her eyes searching for something. She allowed him his moment as she slowly pulled his body to hers with her legs. As he made contact with her, she shifted to align them properly.

Harry let Tonks control the movement as her legs pulled him forward and to her warm body. As the initial sensation passed, Harry managed to ask his previous question again. "Anything you want to tell me?" Tonks cutoff further questioning by tightening a certain place getting Harry to take a deep breath.

"He was just trying to reinforce how important you are to us, Harry." Tonks smiled her most caring and vulnerable smile before slipping her fingers in his hair and pulling his mouth to hers again. "I don't need to be reminded how important you are by him. You remind me well enough, like now for instance."

Tonks moved giving Harry all the motivation he needed to match her pace and they proceed with their previous actions. Harry let himself be overcome by the sensations as he focused on the woman beneath him. He felt the heat pour off her body as they moved together. He smelled her returned-to-normal hair and sighed in her ear as she purred in his. They slowly made their way to climax and collapsed into the bed.

Harry remained on top of Tonks as she held him, in place, with a tight hug for a few minutes. With her eyes closed, Tonks murmured, "He wanted to know if I had been working on Occlumency with you this summer. I guess he tried to read you and couldn't."

"I felt someone trying to get in but I couldn't figure out who it was. I wish they trusted me enough to let me be."

"You know it has nothing to do with trust. They are used to you being a kid that needs taken care of."

"What about you, Nymph?"

Tonks opened her eyes and Harry could see something swimming in them. "Oh Harry, I am the one needing taken care of." She kissed him passionately and tightened on him again causing an instant reaction. "Oh how I love this. Always ready you are."

"What did you expect?"

"Expect - nothing, but I got what I hoped for."

They drifted to sleep still wrapped in each other's arms. Dobby entered the room and levitated the sheet to cover them before straightening up the room happily. It was the happiest day he could remember. He was serving the best wizard in the world. He was a part of a family again, and the family didn't abuse him. He nearly hopped up and down in place before he caught himself. With the room tidied, Dobby closed the door without a sound.

13. Protect Your Friends

Tonks woke up and felt the pressure of Harry on top of her. Normally, she would have loved it, but the pain in her hips told her that she needed to get Harry off of her as soon as possible. With a quick breath, Tonks nudged Harry's shoulder a few times. "Harry, luv, you need to get off of me before I end up paralyzed."

"Huh," Harry asked still half asleep. "Oof, I am sore."

"Not as sore as I am, Harry. Please get off."

Harry moved quickly and as carefully as he could. Once his weight had been removed, Tonks groaned and rolled onto her side breathing deep breaths. "Ow, that hurts." She moved her legs very slowly together before bringing them up to her chest. "Mental note, never fall asleep like that again. Getting there is a lot of fun, but the waking up part is dreadful."

"Sorry, Nymph, I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You sure you didn't?" Tonks asked coyly. "I think you had some ideas like that when you pinched my nipples that one time."

"Well, maybe I got caught up in the moment. Uh, you didn't complain at the time."

Tonks laughed as she stretched out as far as she could. "No, I didn't complain. Quite the opposite actually. I told you that I didn't know what you wanted until you told me. Now that I think about it showing works just as well or better."

"In my own defense, I am still learning what I like. So far, it has been everything, but I think you are a big part of that."

"Glad I could be of service, Harry." Tonks flipped the sheet off and watched Harry respond instantly. "As much fun as that would be Harry, I don't think I could take the abuse yet. Give me a few more hours and I might be recovered enough to take you up on your offer. Now, I think I need a bath to soak in to get rid of the ache in my bones. I might be flexible, but I can't hold positions forever."

Tonks placed her feet on the floor and went to stand, but her legs shook and her knees gave out from under her. She fell to the floor with a whimper. Harry hopped out of the bed instantly and was at her side having no idea how to care for her.

“Um, Harry, could you help me up. It seems my muscle control is at an all-time low right now.” Harry scooped her up and settled her into the bed gently. “Thanks, Harry. I guess I will have to wait a few minutes before trying again.”

Harry nodded before turning and walking gingerly into the bathroom. He Summoned his glasses with his hand before leaving the room. Tonks watched him go and couldn't help but fantasize about him as he walked away from her wearing nothing at all. *‘Oh the dirty thoughts rolling around in my head right now, Mr. Potter.’* She started to rub her legs a little trying to get the blood flow back into them. As she was moving her legs around, Tonks heard the sound of running water in the bathroom. She closed her eyes and focused on her sore body returning to her control.

She was startled when she felt two arms slide under her neck and rump. She opened her eyes to find Harry lifting her into the air and holding her close to his nicely defined form. “Harry, what are you doing?”

“You said you needed a bath so I am taking you to your bath. Running a little slow today are we?”

“Cheeky much?”

“I try to be.” Harry held her tight and carried her into the bathroom where she saw the water filling the bath with light blue bubbles rising from the surface.

“You put soap in it already?”

“No, it comes that way I guess. There was a woman's shape on the valve so I figured that was for women to use. I don't take baths so I am not up on things like that.”

Tonks smelled the flowery scent wafting from the water. "I love the smell. I wonder how it works." Harry shrugged before slowly kneeling down on the rug lying in front of the tub. As carefully as he could, Harry lowered Tonks into the water before leaning back and watching her face.

She sunk into the warm water and felt the restorative properties instantly energize her tender body. She sighed and breathed in the vapor the bubbles were putting off. Lazily, she opened her eyes and found Harry watching her with a slight smile on his face. "Thank you, Harry. This is just what I needed. You are so nice to me."

"You are welcome. I am glad I could help some how considering I did this to you in the first place."

"It took both of us falling asleep like that to make this happen. You just wore me out I guess." Harry blushed a little, but his smile deepened. "So cute when you really smile." Tonks reached out and pulled his face to hers giving him a heartfelt kiss. "Thank you, Harry."

"Anytime, Nymph, you know that."

"Ahh." Tonks stretched out again with her arms reaching up and legs spreading out in the water. She caught Harry's eyes wandering and could see that she had come out of the water a little. A layer of bubbles coated her breasts, but that didn't stop Harry from looking at them. With a chuckle, she slid back into the water as Harry followed the moving clumps of bubbles.

"Uh, sorry," Harry apologized as he realized that he had been caught staring. "It just happens sometimes."

"Don't worry about it. If it didn't happen, then I would begin to wonder. Right now, I am more than confident that I have your attention."

"Imagine that," Harry said as if it was the most obvious statement ever made. "Sharp one you are."

Tonks smirked before reaching out to give Harry a hug. He accepted and leaned in to receive her wet, bubbly hug. Without warning, Tonks gave a tug and pulled Harry neatly into the oversized bath with her.

She managed to keep his head above the water and out of the majority of the bubbles, but his impact with the water caused a small wave that sloshed water and bubbles over all of the edges. With a laugh, Tonks kissed a very surprised Harry on the lips. When she pulled away she giggled at the bubbles that had settled on the top of his head.

"I am sharper than you, dear sir." Harry laughed with her as she reveled in her victory.

"That you are, Nymph." Harry allowed Tonks to continue to hold him, but he slid his hand into the water and found her sensitive spot. He gave it a touch causing her to pause in her victorious laughter. "Maybe I planned this whole thing?" Harry quirked his eyebrow at her waiting for her response.

Tonks moved her hips a little testing them out before rolling on top of Harry and holding him against the back of the bath. "Maybe I planned it, ever think of that?"

Harry hesitated before answering. "I am now." His hands moved slowly along her sides as she slid down into a better position.

"Time for thinking has ended; it is time for action." Tonks moved forward and snogged him as hard as she could while she lowered herself onto a very eager Harry.

They arrived in the team room with only a few minutes to spare. They had to sprint from the room to be on time and entered the training room to find a couple groups waiting in a circle with Horace and Marcus in its center. They sat in the empty seats next to Cal and waited for the meeting to begin.

"Teams," Marcus began with a smile. "Teams Five, Six, and One aren't here today as they are either on a mission or recovering from one. With the expert skill of Team Two, we have learned information from those Death Eaters captured in our very own Ministry. The intel relates to You-Know-Who, his plans, and those who have allied themselves with 'Him.' We are putting together operational plans to carry out assaults on known or supposed locations of You-Know-Who's strongholds or safe havens.

"These missions will be objective oriented with minimal goals in mind. Search and destroy is not out of the question so I know Thor and Bitton will be pleased regardless of the outcome."

Harry saw two rather large men sit up a little taller and rub their hands together. He knew that this week was starting out quite different from the others, and it seemed that it would be filled with interesting things to accomplish.

Marcus continued. "Team Two will continue to extract intel from the captured Death Eaters under Ministry custody as well as the newly captured one delivered to our holding cells last Friday. My congratulations to Ceps and Chamel on the capture. I will add that next time, please include your other teammate prior to storming off to challenge three Death Eaters. Remember, we always want the numbers in our favour before we start a fight."

Harry felt the stares of seven hooded individuals as the other two teams and Cal looked between him and Tonks. Harry did his best to hold his position in his chair and not waver in the slightest. He wasn't sure what they were thinking, but he figured that a few of them were making decisions about him as they looked on.

"All of you will be assigned missions as they become available. I will tell you that our new Minister seems willing to utilize our talents where the normal Auror Teams have a lower chance of success. We are the best and she knows it. I see your day jobs suffering for the foreseeable future from this welcome change in our government. I had a meeting with Minister Bones on Saturday and she expressed her desire in testing our abilities more frequently than Fudge. I believe the old days have returned once again."

Horace stepped forward and scowled menacingly. "If anyone feels that they no longer possess the ability to perform their duties on a more constant basis, please notify me at once. That being said, Team Four you will have a mission tonight acting on the intel gained by Team Two. Team Three, you are hereby activated for Level One operations. As you succeed, your level will be raised accordingly. Let's remind our enemies why we are whispered about in dark

corners and under secrecy spells. Team Three, on me for reassessment and skill tuning.”

Harry watched as Team Two and Four gathered and followed Marcus out of the room. Horace waited for Team Three to meet him near the corner of the room. Harry stood and followed the others wondering what reassessment meant.

“First off, Ceps don’t you ever pull shite like that again. Three against two is not the odds we work with here. I don’t care if you did take out the tosser we have in lock up right from the start. It was still a very losable situation. You got lucky but as I have said before, we respect results here. That is the only reason you are still here. Fuck up like that again and I will wipe your memory clean. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good,” Horace barked easing his mood quickly. “Well done by the way. Now, we may get intel without notice and have to act on it immediately. I know Cal and Chamel have been through this before, but you haven’t, Ceps. Level One operations means you can carryout minor missions that do not have a must-win objective. Basically, all is not lost if you fuck up. Level Two means the mission is important but not do-or-die. Many of the teams are level twos. Level Three means that failure is not an option or it is a hot mission.”

Harry wasn’t sure what a hot mission was and he showed it. “Hot means you kill everything that resists. You are going in and the targets are going to defend to the death. Don’t feel bad, but it will be awhile before you get to that level. The team must work together seamlessly and without fail for some time before they are promoted to Level Three. We only have three teams at that level currently and two of them are occupied right now. Questions?”

Harry didn’t say anything as he thought back to how the incident at the Lovegood’s turned out. He knew second chances were not frequent in this line of work so he would cherish and learn from the few that he received.

“Reassessment means that you show off what you know and where you are with your abilities.” Horace smirked as the targets appeared behind him. “Begin, full list.”

Harry watched as Tonks and Cal began firing spell after spell at their targets. They would fire the same one three times before moving on to the next. Following their lead, Harry did the same.

He cast the same spell three times at his target with his wand before following up wandlessly if he could. He focused on his magic as much as he could. He felt it inside of him and pushed it out forcefully. He fell back onto his new-found confidence and allowed his anger to rise which assisted his magic. Every spell was fired with a determined thrust. Harry knew he could accomplish anything he had to if the situation required it.

As he warmed up, he fell into a rhythm of casting that seemed to match the ebb and flow of his magic. Without noticing, his magic's cycle sped up. Horace watched as Harry's spell casting became faster and more accurate. He was sending spells downrange faster than Cal or Chamel. Each one hit with an accuracy score no lower than the mid 80's and a power score no lower than the high 70's.

As he finished with his most practiced spells, he switched to those he had learned in the last few weeks. Horace read the scores being put up as they appeared. “Excellent improvement, Ceps. Keep it up.”

Harry finished out his assessment with his favourite or most powerful spells. All the bone spells, Reductor, Stunner, and the Unforgivables were displayed last. Unable to think of any others, Harry stepped back from the line and watched Tonks and Cal continue through their vast knowledge of spells. Harry focused on their movements trying to learn something from them. Tonks and Cal ended about the same time as Tonks knew more, but Cal was slower in casting his spells.

“Fine,” Horace said walking up to them. “Cal, Chamel, get Ceps to a point where he can at least resuscitate someone. Right now, he would only be good at watching the person die. I need to look over your scores and determine where to go from here as a team.”

Tonks directed Harry over to the classroom area that had appeared. Cal followed them closely but kept an eye on Horace as he cycled through the spells Harry had used during his assessment. A replica of a person appeared on a table that popped into existence amongst the desks.

“Ceps,” Tonks began, “you need to learn the most basic medical spells and fast. We are going for a level one here so nothing fancy or neat. Crude but effective is the key for this lesson.”

Cal continued, “We all know that you haven’t shown an aptitude for these kinds of spells, but our lives could hang in the balance at some point. I am not going to teach you how to heal or fix injuries. This will be a keep-alive centered lesson so critical care spells are the plan.”

Harry took a deep breath and nodded his acceptance of the goal. As the next two hours drug on, Harry killed the replica more times than he could count. Focusing too much caused the spell to break the ribs leading to the patient being impaled by the broken bones. Harry started stressing as he failed time and time again.

“Ceps,” Tonks questioned, “how are you trying to use these spells? Statistically, you should have succeeded at least once by now. Are you trying to use a soft touch with the Resuscitation spell?”

“I am trying to keep it as soft as I can, but it just isn’t working for me.” Harry couldn’t avoid showing his frustration at the whole situation. “I am trying to picture the result and let my magic do the spell, but it isn’t working here like it usually does.”

“Are you pushing your magic into it at all? Using anything other than the words and movements?” Cal asked while he tried to figure out the problem.

“Of course I push my magic into it,” Harry replied. “That is how I have been trained since I got here. I just push some of it out, but I let the spell do the work.”

“Maybe that is the problem,” Cal said to Chamel who nodded her head in a confused way. “Medical spells aren’t about power; they are about consistency and finesse. Magically powerful people do not tend

to become healers. Volatility is not a good thing when you hold a life in your hands. Perhaps we should pull back some and let you try this as if you were still in school.”

Harry managed to restrain his comment and followed Cal’s instructions precisely. His wand floated lightly over the replica for the examination phase of the spell. When the tip glowed light green, the person was alive and the spell wasn’t needed. When it glowed light red, the person’s heart wasn’t beating and the spell was needed. As expected, Harry’s wand glowed red so he moved it to hover right above the replica’s chest. With a half-circle pattern bringing the holly wand closer to his body, Harry aimed at the replica and in a smooth stabbing motion cast the spell, “Resuscitare!”

The replica convulsed more than it had all day. Harry felt that he had succeeded but Cal quickly got him back on task.

“Ceps,” Cal instructed, “reassess and see if it worked.”

Harry reassessed and found that it worked for a few seconds, but the patient had died again. Harry repeated the spell four more times in quick succession each better than the last. With his final attempt, Cal motioned for Harry to stop.

“Not bad, Ceps. You were getting the hang of it there at the end. The trick is being able to do this while you are under fire or swimming in adrenaline after the fight. I think you have the basic skill down, but if I am ever in this position please get me back here or to St. Mungo’s as fast as you can. Nothing against you, mind, I just don’t want to be your first patient in a life threatening medical situation.” Cal smiled and urged Harry on to another medical spell used frequently, Obturo Cruor, the wound cauterizing spell.

When the replica started bleeding from numerous places, Harry knew he was in for a messy and frustrating lesson. As his clothes became soaked in blood, he worked on the spell time and time again. A soft touch was required and Harry tried to mimic the state of mind he was in when he had conquered Resuscitare. It took over an hour for him to master the techniques required for the spell.

Horace watched from the observation room and laughed to himself. "If he can't throw his magic at it, he is still a schoolboy learning his magic."

"Funny that he is a schoolboy learning his magic, Horace," Marcus commented. "So, are we agreed on his abilities? Quite a respectable showing today wouldn't you concur?" Horace merely grumbled. "I will take that as a yes. Don't be too hard on yourself, old friend. You have taught him some of it. The truly gifted really only need direction and encouragement."

"Bah, quit blowing sunshine up my arse, Marcus," Horace snapped. "Once they finish teaching him how to splint a broken bone we can give him a level one for medical. Still, he would be the last one I would want trying to heal me. Fight with me, no problem, but healing, not a chance."

"What about that shield spell we spoke of?" Marcus asked. "Going to teach that one? We have very few who can do it you know."

"He won't get to it today. Maybe tomorrow we can work on it. I have other plans for this week. He needs to be proficient with a few others by Friday so he can lead his team. It will be a good start for him. Get some confidence and experience under his belt before the real thing."

"I believe he has quite a bit of experience, Horace," Marcus pointed out. "You haven't forgotten his history, have you?"

"No, I haven't but still this is for real."

"And the other times were what?"

Horace paused and watched Harry run through the scenario again. He managed to stop the bleeding faster than any prior attempt earning himself congratulations from his teammates. "Him trying to stay alive. He had no other goal than that really."

"Sometimes yes, sometimes no." Marcus expanded, "He can do it and you know that. Are you not beyond the constant insults and pushing phase of your teaching?"

"I will use what works, Marcus, and I will not change that. He is easy to motivate with insults and criticisms."

"But will he fight for you when it is over? Your methods wouldn't have taught him the skills he is learning right now. He works well in a team as you can see."

"I train the individual; they train the teammate. I will consider your suggestion, but I will handle it my way, Marcus. If it works I will use it."

"I know you will, Horace but remember that Harry is not committed to us yet. We haven't proven ourselves to him, and he can be rather fickle when it comes to his allegiance. Do not jeopardize the goodwill and trust we have built to keep up your persona. He has political capital whether he knows it or not. He could become a vital Operative and ally for this department. He got one minister removed and another installed within thirty minutes."

"He got Albus Dumbledore to come down from his pedestal and dirty himself in the politics of the Ministry. I know of three department heads who trust him without question, and I won't even begin to list how many businesses that young man controls. Continue doing what you do best, but tread lightly when you near his breaking point. He will earn the respect of some of the other teams before the week is out."

Horace paused before answering, "He will gain a few challengers in the process as well, Marcus. A couple Operatives will voice their displeasure as to his standing in such a short time. I have to make sure he is ready for that."

"I believe he is used to friction with others for who or what he is. Leave him be and watch how he handles it. My guess," Marcus offered with a smile, "he will use it and become more determined."

"Care to wager on that?"

"Oh you are a glutton for losing aren't you? One case, muggle this time. I may never have to buy liqueur again," Marcus announced.

“Agreed then,” Horace shook Marcus’s hand before leaving the room to join the blood bath happening in the training room.

Harry stopped the gushing blood from the artificial wound in the replica as another opened up. He settled his mind as he worked the spell again focusing on the movements and words of the spell. Cal had started talking to him in an attempt to distract him from successfully casting the spell. As the blood flow was staunched, he felt someone behind him.

When he turned his head, Harry saw Horace with his wand raised and unleashing a spell in the direction of Tonks. Without thinking, Harry jumped up casting a wandless Imprimis Shield and firing a Bone Breaking spell at Horace in one fluid motion. The Cutting Curse reflected off Harry’s shield and flew off into the ceiling with a sizzle.

Horace reacted with his own shield spell, stopping Harry’s curse, before giving an evil smirk. “Protected your teammate and attacked me without missing a beat. Acceptable, but you didn’t get me.”

“I could try again, Horace,” Harry replied tonelessly not dropping his guard for a second and holding the shield in place.

Horace seemed eager to take on the challenge, but relented after a few tense seconds. “Maybe later, Ceps. As the day has been frittered away,” Horace made a gesture to the blood dripping off of Harry’s cloak, “I just have to adjust your badge to reflect your recent progress, meager that it is.”

Harry waited as Horace kept his wand in a low-ready position. The tension held until Tonks moved to Harry’s side and put a hand on his shoulder. “It is okay, Ceps. I got you if anything happens.”

Horace quirked his eyebrow at Tonks before moving in front of Harry. He dropped his shield allowing Horace to tap his badge and alter the levels on a few of the bars. Harry held his eyes and never let them stray while Horace did the work. “Some may take this as a challenge to their ego, Ceps. Be prepared for that.”

"Noted, sir." Harry watched Horace retreat slowly and leave the room. He sighed and relaxed as Tonks laughed slightly. Cal vanished the replica and checked the time.

"Time for me to get home," Cal announced as he cleaned the blood off his clothes. "It was a good day and you learned some crucial spells that could keep us alive one day. I just hope that you never have to use them, Ceps."

With Harry and Tonks alone in the training room, Harry sighed and looked at his badge for the first time since the change. "Um, is this good or bad, Chamel?"

"Let me take a look, Ceps," Tonks said and moved to look at Harry's badge. As a small smile formed on her lips, Harry knew it was at least something. "Well, I would suggest you keep an eye on Teams Two and Four. They will not like you matching or beating them in levels."

Harry saw the coloured bars stand out against the grey cloak. The red remained unchanged at six; his defensive level had increased one to six. Green was already at seven, but Harry saw that he had one yellow bar showing that he had a couple medical spells down. His stealth level remained at two, but the full seven bars of black left him feeling rather empty inside. The Roman numeral III stood out in its field and the three pips shined in the dim light before the badge faded away into the grey of the cloak.

"Do they expect me to kill now that I have seven bars for the Unforgivables?"

"They expect you to do your job when it needs done," Tonks explained. "You are no different now than you were when you got here this morning...except for the fact that you look like you took a waded across a stream of blood." Tonks laughed as Harry took notice of his lower half still dripping with fluid. Tonks waved her wand and cleaned the blood away leaving Harry perfectly clean. "Wow, that worked well. I have never been very skilled at cleaning charms."

"I guess I got lucky then."

"You better believe it," Tonks quipped before pulling Harry by the arm towards the exit. "To home we go, dear sir."

As they arrived at home, Harry removed his cloak and laid it over the back of a chair in the living room. Tonks joined him, arm in arm, as they entered the kitchen. Tiki and Dobby were moving about the room quickly preparing dinner. Tonks settled into a seat at the smaller table near the far wall, but Harry tried to assist with the preparations.

Tonks couldn't help but laugh when Harry was physically "helped" into the neighboring chair. "Offer your help and they toss you out as if you would ruin everything."

"You know better than to "help" them with their work, Harry. You should count yourself lucky they didn't toss you outside to eat with Jules."

"Nah, I think they are leaving that punishment for you Nymph."

"Oh, you didn't just suggest that I spend more time with that menace of a pet. We have an agreement, her and I. She stays out there and I stay in here unless you are with me at all times. It works out for well."

"Has Jules agreed to this arrangement?"

"I plan to avoid finding out, Harry. I think it is best for everyone involved that way."

Harry started laughing at how Tonks was acting towards Jules. He found it comical how an auror and Unspeakable could be so scared of a simple griffin. "She is only a griffin, Nymph. I guess I just don't see how you can be this way."

"Only a griffin you say," Tonks mocked as she shivered. "Leave it to you to say that about a griffin seeing as you own two I guess it makes sense. You were probably around them when you were born so it isn't a big deal."

"I am not following..." Harry was interrupted by Hedwig flying into the room and settling on his shoulder. The beautiful animal opened her

mouth and gave a sound before rubbing her head against Harry's face a few times. "Hi, girl, everything alright?"

Hedwig ignored the question and finished rubbing her owner before sticking her leg out for Harry to see. A letter was tied to her leg but no name was written on the outside. Tentatively, Harry reached out and removed the letter. He looked over the parchment before untying the rest of the twine. Hedwig received a gentle pet and a one handed hug as Harry read the letter.

Tonks watched him as his eyes moved about the first page and then the second as well. Once he was finished, Harry looked up to Tonks and smiled. "We doing anything on Thursday night?"

"No, but I think you have something in mind."

Harry smiled deepened, "Yes, I do have something. Hermione just invited us over for the evening. Apparently, her parents have been a little nervous about everything going on and wanted to meet some of her friends. I guess her plan to keep most of the information about Voldemort away from then hasn't worked very well. She is worried they won't let her go back to Hogwarts next year. So, she is trying to convince them that she is safe and we are normal people too. It seems the few times they have met the Weasleys hasn't sold them on that idea."

"Imagine that," Tonks quipped. "I know them rather well and the Weasleys are far from normal. Of course, inviting you is a step in the wrong direction since you are as abnormal as you can get even by our standards." Tonks winked at Harry as he scowled good-naturedly.

The next day found Harry and Tonks arriving, as usual, with only a few minutes to spare. Horace handed Tonks a small parcel before diving into the day's grueling lesson. By lunch time, Harry was sore and worn out.

Horace had spent the morning testing Harry's shields under a constant barrage of spells. The sheer force of magic left Harry gasping for breath as he had to match the level of attack with an equal or superior defense. At the beginning, Harry thought it was just

going to be him and Horace, but Tonks and Cal joined in after an hour.

Harry held his shields for as long as he could until they failed under the assault of opposing magic. A few times as his shield fell he threw up another one to stop the spells that continued on. By the end of the session, Harry was sporting some rather nasty injuries that the medical team was waiting to treat as they stood at the edge of the room.

When Horace pulled up his wand and took a step back, Harry collapsed under his own weight. Tonks and Cal moved to help him up as exhaustion took over Harry's body. "When medical has cleared you and you have eaten something come find me. I have a few things to show you today, Ceps. Both of you are needed as well."

Harry endured the poking and prodding of the healers and drank what they told him to. As the skin knitted itself back together on his shoulder, Harry concentrated on his mind. He had found that practicing Occlumency for a few minutes when he had the chance seemed to help many things. His focus was sharper and his mind was clearer. He had better control over his spells and he could sense when his shields were going to fail most of the time before they did. A quick look to his battered body proved that it wasn't foolproof.

Harry could feel his magic running low as Horace had seemed determined to beat it down. The sting and burn of his injuries fought against his efforts to concentrate completely on his mental skills.

"Your injuries are well on their way to being repaired," a healer told him. "How long were they testing your shields, an hour or so?"

Harry opened his mouth as little as necessary to reply. "I am not sure, two or three hours I think."

Tonks checked her watch and did a quick calculation. "It was a little more than three hours actually. Horace worked for the first hour, but he had us in there for the last two."

The healer paused in her work and looked to Tonks. "Surely you are pulling my leg?"

"No, that is how it worked." Tonks looked to Harry and saw him with his eyes closed and his lips tightening and relaxing in a rhythm. The healer shook her head and continued her work. The burns were the last things she healed as they were only superficial. She poured out a small vial of Dreamless Sleep potion and set it on the side table.

"You need at least an hour of good sleep before you can do any more magic today. Your levels are rather low and your magic and healing are closely linked. An hour should be enough time for you to be adequately healed and rested to finish out the day. You have to get a goodnight's sleep tonight though."

"Thanks," Harry said to the healer as he downed the vial and settled into the bed. His mind told him to do as he was told and cooperate. For the first time he felt the magical exhaustion that had been mentioned when he started with the Unspeakables. His entire body seemed deflated and worn. As he thought about the feelings, he remembered a similar tiredness after the Triwizard Tournament but nowhere near as acute.

He felt Tonks move next to the bed and put her feet up on the mattress. She nudged him with her foot causing Harry to smile as he knew she would be with him the whole time. As the potion began to cloud his mind, Harry caught a glimpse of an image of spells flying in all directions and people screaming. The haze of nothingness rolled over the image leaving relaxing blankness in its wake. Harry drifted off with a slight whimper which unnerved Tonks to a degree.

When he awoke, Harry was hungry and his body was aching. A grunt of displeasure alerted Tonks to his return and she grabbed his hand. He felt the warmth and managed to focus his mind on that sensation leading to the rest of his body catching up.

"Ceps," Tonks called, "are you feeling better?"

"As well as expected, Chamel." Harry moved every appendage grimacing when appropriate. "A little sore though."

"More than a little to get those kinds of reactions from you." Tonks patted his hand and moved off to grab a healer.

Mentally, Harry took account of his entire body. He tested everything he could think of from head to toe and anything in-between. The sound of movement told him that Tonks had returned but he knew another person had come as well.

"Sore are you?" Queried a female voice.

"A little," Harry replied as he opened his eyes slowly. The healer was holding a vial in her hand offering it to Harry leaving little choice in the matter. He took it and downed the clear liquid. He was surprised to find a slight mint taste to it. The healer moved her wand over his body checking for anything that may have been missed.

"You won't be at the top of your game today but that should help with most of the soreness. I have other potions, but they have side effects that would prevent you from training further today." The healer finished her scan and left Harry to be helped out of bed by Tonks.

"You good to go?" Tonks asked as Harry wavered a little.

"I will be fine," Harry replied. "Can't keep Horace waiting, can we?"

"You have to eat first."

After a hearty stew loaded with more items than Harry could name, the pair joined Cal and Horace in the training room. Harry saw Cal shrug before turning to them. Horace put his hands together and gave a sinister smile.

"Now that you are done with your lay-about we can get back to work," Horace looked right at Harry. "You are rather skilled in your shield spells, Ceps, but you are missing one, Patrocinor Fidelis. It is a shield spell that you use on others. It was created years ago when kings and princes fought in wars. Wizards who worked with royalty then created this spell to protect the royals while in battle. It will stop both physical and magical attacks on the same level as Fortis Aegis.

"Obviously, Absolvo and Imprimis are stronger shields, but this is a once removed shield so it makes sense. Auror training doesn't attempt this spell as it is hard to create and maintain. The demands on the caster are steep and for the most part you will never need to

use this. I expect your teammates to be able to defend themselves well enough this isn't needed. If they are down, you have bigger problems than trying to protect them, like yourself. There are other shields, mostly specific use spells like confinement spells for potions or pets, but this is the last shield spell for use in a fight. I will tell you that most people never accomplish this spell so I expect the same from you – failure.”

Harry allowed his eyes to bore into Horace's. He sensed the challenge and accepted it without much thought. “Discounting me already, Horace?”

“If the shoe fits, Ceps,” Horace quipped and watched Harry respond as he had planned. “You have the incantation and here is the wand movement.” Horace demonstrated the movements with a practiced touch while Harry paid close attention. “Go ahead and give it a try, Ceps. I doubt you will be able to get it by the end of the day.”

Harry gritted his teeth and promised himself that he would prove Horace wrong. The time passed as Harry tried to master the spell. At first nothing happened, and then a flicker of a shield began to appear around Tonks. With constant corrections in his movements and effort, Harry finally had the process down.

Horace had stopped adjusting Harry's mechanics and only continued to comment on his repeated failures. Tonks gave him encouragement while Cal watched and gave intermittent, sideways glances in Horace's direction.

As the day ended, Harry knew he was running out of time to prove that he could cast the spell. He focused on Tonks' face and searched for the energy to cast the spell. A few times the shield had almost formed before collapsing on its own or from Horace firing a basic spell at it causing it to fail instantly. Harry willed the spell to work. He forced all the magic he could into the effort.

The first attempt produced a weak shield that wavered before failing. The second time Harry allowed his frustration to get in the way and nothing appeared. The third time, with a calm mind, Harry cast the spell. A dull grey dome appeared around Tonks and tendrils of colour could be seen moving about the outside of the shape.

Tonks congratulated Harry in his accomplishment before Horace fired two Stunners at Tonks ending the celebration. Harry's fourth and fifth attempts were no better than his first. Horace smiled as he ended the day's efforts and walked up to Harry.

"I see that you aren't perfect after all, Ceps." Horace watched for the reaction and was granted with a rather determined and spiteful response. "Maybe tomorrow you will put forth more effort. Merlin knows you failed today." Horace left the room with a triumphant expression.

Harry watched him leave and allowed his anger to swell up. The spell had worked to a certain degree but nothing ever seemed good enough for Horace. Harry waited until Cal left the room, after Horace, before allowing his weakness to show. He reached out to Tonks and grabbed her arm to prevent himself from falling to the floor. "I would like to go home right now, Chamel."

"I got you, Ceps." Tonks helped Harry stand upright and make his way to the team room before they portkeyed back home. Tonks prodded Harry to eat the meal Dobby and Tiki had made before putting him to bed. As Harry was fighting the urge to sleep, Tonks showed him the parcel she had received earlier that day.

"Horace gave me the driver's license you need. It has all the proper endorsements so you can drive and ride. Now you go to sleep. It will be here when you wake up."

Wednesday dawned and Harry awoke feeling renewed and ready for the day. A kiss, a hug, and a little play with Tonks led to Harry feeling better than any other day that week. They arrived in the training room to find Horace speaking with Marcus. When Cal entered, Marcus walked away leaving the team to Horace.

"After yesterday's rather weak showing with the shield," Horace insulted, "I hope you can perform better today. Using magic to protect you is great when it will do that, but there are some spells which are too powerful for shield spells to stop. All of the Unforgivables are beyond the protective abilities of the shields you know. The most the Imprimis Shield can do is alter the direction of the Cruciatus Curse a

little bit. In practice, you will still be hit by it and all of you already know what it feels like.

“The best way to stop these spells and all others is to avoid them or stop them before they get to you. On that train of thought begins today’s lesson. Conjuring something to stop a spell is effective and can be faster than other options. I know Chamel has some trouble with this skill, and Ceps has never attempted it so we have our work cut out for us today.

“Some believe in Conjuring exactly what they need for the current situation while others believe in mastering one object to be used for every situation. Since this is not an academic exercise, we are going to focus on one multipurpose item. Certain people Conjure shields, the metal ones from old, to use for this. I think they are too focused on the symbolism but to each their own. Some use wooden objects, but they can splinter providing your enemy more weapons.

“We need something simple and easy but strong enough to make it worth our time and energy. Any ideas from you, Ceps?” Horace ignored Cal and Chamel awaiting an answer from Harry.

Harry thought about his choices. Every instance of an Unforgivable being used against him swam to his mind. The statues Dumbledore used were the first things to come to mind, but that wasn’t Conjuring since Dumbledore merely animated things already existing. The tombstones from the graveyard were next and they seemed to be a better choice. Stones were everywhere and Harry remembered Hermione saying something about Conjuring and raw materials while she stressed over OWLs.

“How about stone?” Harry offered. “It is strong and can stop spells pretty well.”

“For once,” Horace began, “you offered a useable suggestion. Stone is the best item to choose from. Not only will it stop most spells, but it is heavy enough that it can be used as a weapon should the blocked spell not destroy it upon contact. Marble is a great stone to Conjure. It can take a beating and when it is struck it will absorb the spell and become a fine powder. Sometimes it will produce shrapnel, but most of the time it will fall apart as safely as one could hope.”

Horace showed Harry how to Conjure marble and had him practice it a few times. With some help, the rock was appearing but it disappeared quickly. Cal helped Harry make the marble larger and thicker along with lasting longer. Harry found that forcing his magic into the spell only worked so well. He had to concentrate on the spell and the item Conjured until it became natural to do so.

His Conjured shield would fade away if Harry was distracted too early in the process. Over the course of an hour, Harry felt like he had figured out the spell enough to risk testing it out. Horace moved around the room making Harry move with him. As the first spell was fired, Harry tried to Conjure the stone. He was a little too slow and had to dive out of the way as the spell continued on uninhibited. Harry learned from his mistakes and focused even harder. The shield appeared faster each time and stayed longer.

The simple spells Horace was firing off increased in strength and frequency as he battered Harry's Conjured defense. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Cal doing the same to Tonks' shield of rock. It looked like they were playing around more than fighting unlike how Horace continued his vicious assault on Harry.

As the stone was beaten away, Horace gave Harry pointers on when to abandon his shield and form a new one. As hour three passed, Horace called a stop to the work. "At least Chamel has overcome her block with this spell and Ceps seems moderately capable. The problem is that your enemy is not going to sit back and fire spells at your shield so you can feel better. He will move around and attack from all angles. Speed and flexibility are the keys to making this technique work.

"Sometimes standing and fighting is the way to do it. Other times, running and dodging will keep you alive. Knowing when and what is the real skill I have to teach you. The strongest rock up front will not stop the weakest Stunner from behind. A good way to work it is to block the incoming spell, return fire, and then move to a new position. If you can combine the first two steps, then do it. Do not give your enemy a chance to get into a rhythm. Keep them thinking and always moving where you want them to go.

"I have prior obligations for the rest of the day so keep working on this skill amongst yourselves. Teach Ceps a few more concealment spells so he won't be found out while on a mission." Horace left them alone to teach each other.

Harry learned a lot of useful spells from Cal and Tonks as they worked until around six in the afternoon. As Harry and Tonks returned to Potter Estate, they changed out of their cloaks and into something more comfortable for flying. Chasing the last rays of sunlight, Harry flew around on his broom seeking the snitch as furiously as he could.

Tonks gave a few attempts to compete against Harry, but the fact of Harry being the youngest seeker in a century was made clearly abundant with little effort. On his Firebolt, Harry was an even more daunting opponent. Allowing her mind to wonder, Tonks was startled when something crashed into her as she hovered in the center of the field.

A flash of red told her enough and she flew off as fast as she could in the opposite direction. Jules gave chase and screeched at her heels. Tonks flew flat out as fast as the broom could go in an attempt to elude the massive creature. Knowing that things could end very quickly and badly, Tonks yelled for Harry's help.

As she curled around the goals, she saw Harry fly up beside Jules and yell at the griffin. Jules looked to be determined to catch Tonks and ignored Harry until he slammed into Jules' head. As the griffin looked at its attacker, she quickly pulled up and landed with its head down.

Harry joined it on the ground and began scolding her. Tonks flew up behind Harry and dismounted from the broom. She walked up to him keeping Harry between her and Jules at all times.

"...Could have hurt her or worse! Don't ever do that again! She is supposed to be here, Jules. Now you apologize to Nymph right this instant."

Tonks watched as Harry held his ground in front of the large griffin who looked more like a dog that knew it had been bad. The mournful eyes flitted up to look at Harry and Tonks before dropping to the

ground again. As the griffin moved forward, Harry looked to Tonks and smiled in a reserved way. "You okay, Nymph?"

"A little scared from trying to fly for my life, but I will be fine." Tonks watched as Jules stopped in front of her and stared into her eyes while looking apologetic. Tonks had always had a soft spot for animals. A few stray dogs had found their way into the Tonks household while she was growing up. The look in Jules' eyes told her everything she needed to know. "I accept your apology, Jules, but never do that again."

Tonks looked more sure of herself than she felt inside. She knew that if Harry hadn't been there to stop Jules, she would have eventually been knocked out of the air by the creature. Jules lowered her head to let Tonks pet her, something that had never happened before.

"That is good, Jules," Harry told her firmly. "Nymph is good and you are to treat her as such." Once Tonks stopped petting her, Jules left the field and returned to the house at a slow walk. "I hope she learned her lesson."

"I hope she doesn't try to kill me again," Tonks sighed before hugging Harry. "Thank you, Harry." The smirk told him that she was up to no good. "My hero, Harry Potter."

"Cheeky minx," Harry called as he hefted her over his shoulder and jogged back the house. They had walked no further than five feet into the kitchen before Tiki popped in, took their brooms, and popped away. "There has to be something to that. Maybe my dad did something years ago and she won't let it happen again."

From her position draped over his shoulder, Tonks smacked his bum. "Hey, we were having fun until you got all reflective and such. Either put me down, Harry Potter, or find something else to do with me."

"I will find something else to do with you, Nymphadora Tonks."

As they disappeared up the stairs, Dobby put Warming Charms on the food that had been laid out on the table. It was another hour before the charms were lifted and the food consumed.

After a short day on Thursday at the Ministry, Harry and Tonks left home with a meeting to keep. They Apparated to a location near Hermione's house that Tonks had picked out which provided some cover from being seen or heard. The small park had a few playthings, but most of the space was open. No fence was present and the grounds were well cared for.

Harry figured that the neighborhood didn't have any Dudleys or friends of Dudley wondering about causing trouble. Everything was as orderly as Harry expected from where Hermione grew up. He couldn't see her tolerating anything not being just right.

They left the park and watched the numbers on the large homes increase. The sidewalk was in perfect repair and no weeds could be found in any of the yards. Some might have thought the neighborhood to be dull and boring like Privet Drive, but Harry could see that it was pride in your home and where you lived that drove these people not trying to outdo each other.

He felt a welcoming feeling in the air and could see how Hermione ended up the way she did. She always trusted adults and authority figures. Seeing the surroundings she had been exposed to, he completely understood her motivations and reasons behind it. As a middle-aged woman pruned her rose bushes, she waved at Harry and Tonks as they continued down the street.

Harry returned the greeting and calculated that Hermione's house was the light blue one on the right side of the quiet street. He smiled as he thought about how she would greet him and the questions that she would ask him. His smile was noticed by Tonks and she asked him as much.

"Well, just wait and see how it goes. She will be happy to see me. Then she will ask some questions. Then she will lose control of her inquisitive nature. Finally, she will demand to know what is going on."

"Have it all planned out, do you?" Tonks asked.

"She has been my friend for five years. You can almost set your watch by her. Ron and I have had a running joke about it for a couple years. First to say what she says, exactly, wins a chocolate frog. I am

good at it, but Ron is downright scary sometimes. I think he gets that from his mum.”

“Downright scary sounds like an accurate depiction of Molly when she gets going.” Tonks looked at the house and could see the care put into it. Not a single board was out of place and the paint was in perfect condition. She laughed at Harry as he shook his head. “What is it?”

“How can everything look so perfect and not feel like Privet Drive? So many things are similar but it doesn’t feel like there at all. Couldn’t Dumbledore have dropped me off here or something? Couldn’t Hagrid have gotten lost and decided this place was good enough?”

“You wouldn’t be who you are if that had happened. As sad as it sounds, I am glad it worked out as it did. You wouldn’t be the Harry I care about if things had been different.”

“Well,” Harry sighed still wearing a smile. “Ready to meet the Grangers?”

“Sure, Harry. Lead the way dear sir.” Tonks bowed and swept her hand towards the door. Harry elbowed her in the shoulder lightly as he passed her and walked up to the door and knocked. As the seconds ticked by, Harry heard footsteps approach the door.

It opened to reveal Hermione dressed as a typical muggle young woman. She had rather fashionable clothes and her hair had calmed even more giving her a more mature look. “Harry!” She squealed and rushed forward to hug him tightly. As Hermione hugged him, she planted a firm kiss on each of his cheeks. She moved back and welcomed him into the entryway.

Tonks watched the interaction with a raised eyebrow and caught movement in the back of the house. A man and a woman were moving towards the door but they seemed to hold back as they followed their daughter’s actions as well. Harry motioned for Tonks to enter first as Hermione hugged her too but didn’t kiss her.

Once the door was closed, Hermione began asking questions as only she could. "How are you doing, Harry? How are you feeling? Have you been studying at all? Have you done anything fun?"

Harry saw Hermione's parents watching their daughter question him without a pause. Longing smiles grew across their faces as Hermione failed to notice their presence. Tonks eyed him letting him know her question. "Wait for it."

"So what is this I hear about you leaving the Dursley's? You know it isn't safe. What did Professor Dumbledore say about it? Where are you living now? Tell me about Fudge and all that. And did you have to do it now?"

The adults were watching the non-stop show and humour could be found on all of their faces. "Wait for it." Harry said as Hermione ran on.

"Have you had any more dreams or visions? I heard you yelled at Professor Dumbledore. What were you thinking? You better have a good excuse, Harry." Hermione finally paused to take a deep breath. "Well? Are you going to say something or not?"

Harry smiled at her in a mischievous way before replying. "It's good to see you too, Hermione. I didn't catch your second through twentieth question so could you ask them again. And slower this time if you would. But before that, it is a pleasure to see you again, Mr. and Mrs. Granger."

Hermione swiveled on the spot wearing a surprised expression on her face. She smiled weakly trying to cover up the fact that she had gotten carried away. "Couldn't you have told me they were there, Harry?"

"That wouldn't have been nearly as much fun as letting you figure it out for yourself, Hermione. Besides, you hate being told things when you can figure them out for yourself." For his cheeky comment, Hermione smacked him on the shoulder and completely ignored the shocked looks on her parents' faces.

"If our daughter can remember her manners before the night is through, you can call me David," Mr. Granger told Harry and Tonks. "This is my wife Jane. We have heard a lot about you, Harry."

Jane Granger continued. "At the beginning, we heard about you in much the same way as our daughter spoke a few moments ago. That excited and rambling manner you just witnessed to be specific."

Hermione held her head high but closed her eyes letting the embarrassment wash over her. "Why thank you, mother, father, for being so understanding."

Tonks smirked at Harry. "I told you how it would happen, Tonks."

"How what would happen, Harry," Hermione queried.

"He told me exactly how you would greet him and how your questions would go," Tonks answered.

Hermione hung her head before smacking Harry again. "I know you too well, Hermione. There is no shame in that," Harry told her giving her a nudge in the arm receiving a smile in return. "This is Ny... Tonks. She has been a friend this summer."

Hermione looked to Harry and Tonks before settling back on her heels. Harry knew he was found out as soon as she perked her eyebrow at him and then in Tonks' direction. Harry let the adults greet each other while he gave Hermione a stare in an attempt to tell her to drop it. Only a knowing smile was returned for his trouble.

"Dinner won't be ready for awhile," Jane said. "So how about we sit in the living room and talk for a bit."

As they moved deeper into the house, Harry saw the markings of a wonderful childhood. The entryway had slightly worn carpet that showed a family lived there and that was something that Petunia never would have allowed. Pictures adorned the hallway depicting vacations in various places, other family members, and Hermione from when she was first born all the way until the present. In every picture the people were smiling and looking happy. Harry saw a few generational pictures and wondered if there was any of his family

around his house. He could feel something in the house and it made him feel at ease.

He was broken from his thoughts as Hermione started talking to him quietly. "Are you doing okay?"

"Yes, I am fine, better than fine actually. It has been a great summer so far."

"How much of that is because of Tonks, oops, I mean your girlfriend?" Hermione smirked at Harry as he looked away.

"I guess I can add you to the list then."

"What list?"

"The list of people who know about us."

Hermione inhaled sharply. "You mean it is true?"

"Like you didn't know as soon as you gave me the I-know-and-don't-bother-denying-it look. You always do that you know."

"I can't help being right all the time," Hermione said in her all-knowing-tone. "I know you too well. Besides, Ginny gave me a few clues in her recent letter. And before you go off about security and all that, they were hand delivered by Professor Lupin on Monday."

"Clues?"

"Only things that we would understand," Hermione waved off his concern. "You would have to know you really well and be on the inside of a few things to get it."

"Leave it to the two of you to have a secret code for you to communicate about things."

"What will really get you is that the "code" as you put it only works for you, Harry."

“What!” Harry asked louder than he meant to. The adults stopped the tour to look at Harry. “No problems here, continue please.” Harry gave Hermione a glare as she half laughed half snorted at him.

“Can’t tell they have spent the better part of five years together can you?” David asked to no one in particular.

“Ms. Tonks,” Jane asked in a low voice. “Are you magical like the kids?”

“Yep,” Tonks replied and proved her statement by changing her hair colour right before their eyes. “I can do certain things most people can’t though.”

Jane and David stepped back in amazement at the trick only to have Hermione speak up. “She is a metamorphmagus. She has the ability to alter her features in various ways to include shape, colour, and style. A metamorphmagus...”

Hermione continued to regurgitate whatever textbook she had read as they entered the living room. Once they were seated, Harry in the middle with Tonks and Hermione on either side with the remaining Grangers on the opposite couch. At the Granger’s urging, Tonks showed them a few other faces and colours. It was a big hit with them and it allowed Hermione to get some of the answers she wanted from earlier and in a way that her parents couldn’t listen in.

“So, Harry,” David prompted, “tell us a little bit about yourself.”

“Um,” Harry looked to Hermione, “what has Hermione told you about me? No sense in repeating what she has already told you.”

“You are a great friend who would stand up for anyone who needed it,” Jane answered. “You are handsome and you play a sport on a broom.” Harry reddened a little at the handsome comment only to be prodded by Tonks. “You have a habit of getting into trouble and getting out of it.”

“Ah,” Harry interrupted, “in my own defense trouble finds me. I don’t go looking for it.” Hermione did her best not to laugh, but Tonks didn’t

hesitate in showing her disbelief. "You two are no help at all. You make me out as a troublemaker with only one mission in life."

"Sorry, Harry," Hermione said as she fought her laughter. "But they know enough of the details that you aren't going to convince them otherwise at this point. They have read the Daily Prophet you know."

"Yeah, like that is an accurate account of who I am," Harry sat back and pouted a little. "Don't believe a word of what that paper said about me."

"We understand how the press works, Harry," David said. "I think our dear daughter has sold you out to a certain degree. She was rather chatty about her first few years in school." Hermione hung her head in guilt. "Only recently has she become more selective in her stories. No doubt our wonderfully thorough daughter has alerted you to our concerns about your world. We know there is a war going on and that associates of yours are involved. We have also figured out that you and Hermione are involved in some way."

Hermione took a deep breath as her father revealed the one thing she didn't want them to know. "What makes you think that, dad?"

Harry watched as both of Hermione's parents gave her knowing looks quite similar to her own. "Honey," Jane began, "as much as you think you were protecting us from the truth, you are smart for a reason. We can read between the lines and we know that you have been in some situations that we wouldn't approve of. We were notified of your injuries at the end of the school year. All we want to know is the truth."

Hermione was about to deny it, but Harry stopped her by putting his hand on hers. "Mione, I can answer this one."

"Harry?"

"They want the truth, they deserve the truth." Harry sighed and rubbed his face as Hermione looked away. The Grangers saw the despair on the kid's faces and saw the same look on Tonks' face too. "I am not sure how much detail Hermione has gone into, but I will give you the short version."

Harry explained the first war in a very brief sort of way ending with his parents' murder and him being shipped off to his relatives. The Grangers saw the anger in both of the women's faces, but Tonks was far more expressive and even unnerving. Harry told them about Voldemort and his goals. He told them about 'His' repeated attempts to get a body and 'His' ultimate success the year before.

The trip into the Ministry led Jane to tears and David to express anger. Hermione held her head high as Harry described everything she had done to help him, and the things she had prevent him from doing at the wrong times. He ended with Sirius's death, and asked them if they had any questions.

The Grangers looked at each other before looking at how old the Harry before them looked. They had watched him age as he told the story. Many of the bits of information Hermione had told them made better sense. They looked at their own flesh and blood to find her defiantly looking back. "I am Harry's friend and that will never change. His life is in danger and I will not leave him to be killed."

"Your life is in danger, sweetie," David prompted to see what her response would be. He saw Harry look at her and he saw the same concern he had for his own daughter.

"If Voldemort wins in the magical world," Hermione said in the same determined way she showed, "we will be next in the muggle world. He wants both, and he won't stop. I would rather fight with Harry than hide here. I will do my part to help. I am friends with Harry for a reason."

"Yeah, to make sure I do my homework." Harry laughed at his own joke before Hermione joined him.

"You would be as bad as Ron if I wasn't there," Hermione shifted to her McGonagall mode. "You would never study until the night before and everything would be shoddily done at that. Think of your OWLs and now the NEWTs. Oh, you two would be hopeless without me there to motivate you."

"One woman's motivation is another man's torture," Harry quipped and was smacked for his troubles. Hermione began listing off every

test and grade he had gotten that she helped him study for. As she continued, Harry's eyes kind of glazed over and he agreed with Hermione when she expected it. She rambled on and on as he agreed with her automatically.

"See," Tonks added, "how could you break up a team like this. Hermione has put so much work into Harry it would be a shame to throw it all away now."

The Grangers laughed at Harry and how quickly he had allowed Hermione her way in the dynamic of the conversation. "One could mistake them for a married couple," David said getting a playful jab for the comment.

Interrupting Hermione's never-ending diatribe about her scholastic efforts, Harry added, "Nah, she needs someone to argue with at length. I just agree with her. Ron, on the other hand, will argue about anything just to see how worked up she can get."

"What?" Hermione asked in a demanding tone. "He does not argue with me just to see how worked up I can get. How could you say such a thing?"

In as offhanded and minimizing a way as he could, Harry answered her. "Because it is the truth. Just ask anyone." Harry looked at the Grangers and asked if they had any more questions.

"Can we protect Hermione in any way or by doing anything?" They asked as one.

"If Voldemort wants you dead, you get dead," Harry said simply.

"Unless you are Harry," Tonks and Hermione added much to his embarrassment.

"Yeah, well, my luck is bound to run out some time," Harry corrected them.

"I would take that bet, Harry," Tonks offered and Hermione agreed.

“Honestly, letting Hermione learn as much as she can would be the best way to protect her. She will learn more than anyone else and that knowledge will be crucial to staying alive. I hate the fact that my friends are in danger but pushing them away wouldn’t work. Then, they are just farther away and easier targets for the Death Eaters. If I am around, I will always be the first target. I can live with that.”

The Grangers had trouble seeing this boy or even young man as a target for anything more than a girl’s crush. The unruly hair, defined jaw, solid frame, and adorable smile made it even harder to see him as the target of a murderer.

“I think,” Jane started but stopped as she really didn’t know what to say. “Look at the time; I think dinner should be ready soon.” She excused herself and hurried into the kitchen. David stood, smiled, and followed his wife. Tonks saw Hermione bursting with questions and she knew that they wouldn’t be asked with her in the room.

“I will see if they need any additional information or entertainment,” Tonks said as she shifted her hair colour to a bright red.

“Harry,” Hermione faltered. “What is going on? I get a letter saying that you left the Dursleys and you have been confrontational with Dumbledore. What is going on?”

“I am taking control of my life, Hermione. Sirius died because I wasn’t told things I should have known. Everything would have made sense, and I would have known the reasons for certain things. I will not, I can not let that happen again. That is why I stood up to Dumbledore. The Dursleys didn’t change and I had enough of it. Besides, I am living where I should have been the whole time. I have learned so much in the last few weeks even you would be surprised.”

At her joking look of doubt, Harry answered the unasked challenge. “Most of it hasn’t been from a book so that should make it more believable for you. I have my own Quidditch pitch and I have Sirius’s bike. It has been the best summer of my life.”

“Really?” Hermione asked with a smirk. “And where does Tonks fit in to it?”

"That," Harry looked at his hands as he picked lint off the pair of pants Tonks had picked out for him. "She is kind of at the center of it all. She helped me when I needed it and wouldn't ask for it. She was there when I couldn't ask for it. She helped me survive the loss of Sirius, and she helped me take control of my life. Without her, I don't know where I would be right now. Most likely, Vernon would have killed me that first night."

"Oh, Harry, what happened?"

"He knocked me out as soon as I got inside the house. Tonks stopped him and healed me. She never left after that."

"How close are you?" Hermione assumed a look that Harry had seen on Parvati and Lavender more than once over the years.

"Um, well, let's just say that we are close and leave it at that, okay. The twins would kill to know who it is and the specifics would be too tempting for them to restrain themselves. I doubt even Molly would be able to stop them if they caught wind of you knowing about her let alone knowing what we get up to."

"Don't you think she is too old for you, Harry?"

"Don't you think I am too old for her? It isn't like I act like I am fifteen or even sixteen, and she sure doesn't act like her age. I think we are good match all-in-all. She makes me happy and I think I do the same for her." Harry gave Hermione a real, heartfelt smile.

"Do you love her?"

"I have no idea what love feels like, Hermione. It is something foreign to me."

"Harry," Hermione shook her head at him while closing her eyes in disappointment. "I love you. The Weasleys love you. Yes, even Ron. Hagrid and Lupin too. I even think McGonagall loves you in her own way. You may not want to hear it, but Dumbledore loves you. That might be why things happened as they did recently. Can't you tell when someone loves you?"

“Obviously not, or you wouldn’t have had to tell me.”

“When I hugged you today, what did you feel?” Hermione fell into teacher mode again and she looked determined to teach Harry this subject.

Seeing a chance to one-up Hermione at her own game, he pulled a page from Tonks’ book. “I felt that you are no longer a girl but a young woman.” Harry laughed as Hermione completely lost her composure.

“I think that is the first time you have ever done that, Harry.” Seeing a chance to get back at him, she stepped up to the plate. “Would like a better feel then, Harry?”

Harry sputtered as he heard Hermione’s response. “Uh, no. I think someone might get mad about me doing that.”

“Tonks?”

Harry saw a chance to save face a little and took it. “No. In a rather surprising way I think she might encourage me, but Ron would be completely murderous if I did.” Success was shown as Hermione buried her head in her hands.

“I think it is best if we stop discussing this subject,” she said. “You aren’t the same Harry you were at the platform.”

Taking a rare victory over her, Harry smiled and accepted Hermione’s surrender. “You should have been there for Fudge’s sacking. It was priceless.” He told her all about it and after a few minutes, Hermione joined Harry in his happiness.

Jane found the two sitting on the couch at each end. Both were talking as if they were back at school. Hermione had her feet positioned under herself and laughed when it was appropriate. Harry was camped at the other end in the normal teenaged-boy way that put comfort above all else. He chided Hermione when she carried on and pushed her when she didn’t.

Jane could see why her daughter had become friends with Harry. She knew her daughter was far too serious and bookish for her own good, but at an early age Hermione made it clear that she was going to do things her own way with minimal input from her parents. Together, they balanced out certain aspects of their personalities. Tonks had clarified a few points and most of them had related to how much Hermione and Harry needed each other. At first the mother in her thought it was romantically since Hermione had been very closed off about that subject since her fourth year. What she saw told her that romantic thoughts weren't part of their friendship.

"Dinner is almost ready, kids." She watched as Harry was respectful and proper and Hermione thanked her as she always did. Harry stood first and assisted Hermione up without hesitation. Her daughter accepted the help and they walked into the dining room continuing their conversation from earlier leaving Jane to think further about the decision that seemed to hang over her head.

The dining room was formal enough for the occasional dinner party but comfortable enough for everyday use. Harry found the plates and set them out along with the silverware Hermione had directed him to. David watched the young man going above and beyond what a guest should, but Harry carried himself in a way that showed he had a purpose in what he was doing.

Hermione moved to stand next to her father and leaned into him. "He is my friend and I will not abandon him, dad. Please understand that. I need both you and mum to be there incase something happens to my friends. I know I hid things from you, but I hope you know why now that Harry told you the main points."

"You could have told us, honey," David tried to impress upon his only child. "You know we would have listened to you. We would have helped you through it."

"The chance of you pulling me out of Hogwarts was too much to risk. The first month or so might not have been very much fun, but then Ron and Harry saved me and it has been great ever since. Granted, we have had our moments, but I couldn't ask for better friends. I couldn't risk losing them like that. I can't go back to being like you and

mum. I love you both dearly, but I am a witch and I belong there. I can't run away now."

"We just want you to be safe, Hermione." David looked into his daughter's eyes and saw the stubborn glint waiting to be released. It was the same look she had when it was bedtime, only unlike other children, Hermione refused to put her book down until she fell asleep with the light on and the book leaving a crease in her skin.

"Delaying the inevitable only prolongs the suffering, father. You told me that when I was five and I wouldn't let you pull out that one tooth."

"Only you could relate that situation to this one. You are far too intelligent for your own good." David hugged his little girl while waiting for the answer he knew was coming.

"You know what being in Gryffindor House means. I will not run from what I know to be the right thing. Please let me make this choice."

David and Hermione watched Harry place the glasses where they belonged. He balanced them in his arms as he set them down. He only had two left when he twitched violently and reached for scar. One of the glasses landed on the table with a clutter while the other missed. As fast as he could, Harry snatched the glass out of the air without much thought and set it on the table before putting his hand to his head and dropped to his knees.

"Harry!" Hermione left her father's side and was at Harry's in a second. David moved to join them, but held back as Harry seemed to fight through a tremendous amount of pain. His daughter seemed unfazed by the whole thing and rubbed Harry's shoulders as he worked through the pain.

The shuddering breaths let them know that the pain was still heavily consuming Harry's effort. Tonks had heard Hermione's shout and entered the room at a run. She moved next to Harry and held him to her giving him quiet directions to focus and block the pain. Hermione watched her best friend fight against the scar pain that she had been witness to all too often.

“Harry,” Hermione asked tentatively, “has this been happening often?”

Tonks answered for Harry as he wasn’t paying attention. “It has happened a few times but not often. Harry has improved his Occlumency skill recently. He must have been taken by surprise or something.”

Jane had followed Tonks and kept her place next to her husband. She too watched Hermione’s anxious mood as she tried to help Harry. As the scene played out, Harry gained control over the pain and managed to open his eyes.

“Always the center of attention,” he joked. “I am fine, no worries. I only have two glasses left to place and the table will be set.”

“Harry,” Hermione shifted into her over-bearing stance. “Does Dumbledore know your scar has been hurting?”

“If he did, there is nothing he can do about it.” Harry took a deep breath and forced the pain away. “I am better. I can fight off these things pretty well right now. Give me a few more months and I should be able to stop them completely. Let it go, Hermione. You will only worry yourself if you think on it anymore.”

Hermione scowled, but left Harry to handle it his own way. “If you are sure, Harry, then I will trust you. I will help if I can. You only have to ask.”

“Thank you for the offer, but I can work through this.” Harry stood and finished setting the table. “Table’s ready.” He seemed bright and cheery as if nothing had happened moments before.

“I will just go get the food,” Jane said and disappeared into the kitchen. David and Hermione followed as Tonks helped Harry into a chair.

“Is it always like that?” Jane asked her daughter as she occupied her hands with the platter of turkey.

“Harry has scar pains from time to time,” Hermione explained. “He gets them when Voldemort is happy or mad or torturing someone. They are connected from the Killing Curse that failed. He had a lot of these things last year. Harry has one of the highest thresholds for pain that I know of. For him to drop like that, it must have been really bad. At least the scar didn’t bleed.”

“Will he take an aspirin if I offer?” Jane asked not knowing what to do.

“No,” Hermione said. “Harry hates looking weak in front of anyone. It comes from being raised by those “people”. I doubt it would work since our medicine can’t even stop it.”

“He seems okay with that nice Tonks woman,” Jane commented.

“Um, well, Harry and Tonks are involved,” Hermione admitted with a guilty look. “I am only telling you because I don’t want you asking him embarrassing questions about it. Don’t tell anyone else, please.”

“I thought there was something there, but I wasn’t sure,” Jane said. “Isn’t she a little old for him?”

“He said he was happy and I am happy for him,” Hermione answered with an air of finality. “He is happy and that is enough for me. I asked him the same question, but he looked so happy that it isn’t worth mentioning again.”

“I thought you liked Harry as more than just a friend,” David said.

“Dad, Harry is more like a brother than anything else.”

“Huh, well I guess that leaves that redhead you talk about.”

“Dad, now is not the time to talk about this.” Hermione grabbed the stuffing and started walking out. Under her breath, both parents heard her murmur, “Never is the time to talk about this, thank you very much.”

As dinner neared its end, Harry leaned back in his chair and, again, enjoyed the feeling the home gave him. He watched Hermione and her father fight over the wishbone that Tonks had dried magically.

Hermione won and made her wish giving each of her parents a directed look.

Everyone helped clean away the meal and leftovers were stored in the icebox. Everyone settled into their original spots in the living room and chatted about various things that, at first, weren't connected to magic at all. A few hours of conversation led to deeper discussions involving politics and the magical world reentered the discussion. As Harry ignored most of the conversation, he relaxed and decided to practice his Occlumency in an effort to prevent a reoccurrence of earlier.

As he calmed his mind, a sharp noise was heard outside. Shouts and yells preceded flashes of colour that bathed the living room in eerie lights. A burst of green caused Hermione to shoot to her feet followed closely by her parents. Tonks hopped from her position and drew her wand. In his calmed state of mind, Harry thought through what was going on. The house had yet to shake from the impact of the spells meaning that something was protecting them.

"Hermione, get your wand and be ready to fight," Harry ordered above the frightened chatter. Hermione looked to Harry and watched him stand looking more focused than she could ever remember seeing in him.

"It is upstairs, Harry."

"Nymph, go with her and gather what you can quickly. We have limited time until whatever it is protecting us fails."

"It is a ward that Dumbledore put up last summer," Tonks explained much to the surprise of everyone. "He knew your friends would be targets and he did what he could. He will know that the ward is under attack and he will bring help. We only have to hold out until they show up."

"I have no intention of risking everyone's lives waiting for Albus to arrive and save the day. Get what you can and make it fast," Harry left no room for debate as he moved to stand in the hallway. "I will guard your parents, Hermione. Trust me."

Hermione had never taken her eyes off of him. "Okay. This way, Tonks." Hermione led Tonks to the back stairwell and disappeared up the stairs.

"Harry, what is going on?" David asked. He saw the look of sheer power growing in Harry's eyes as the assault continued outside.

"Welcome to the front lines of the war. They are here to kill Hermione to punish me. I swear to you that they will have to kill me before they get to her or you." Harry drew his wand in an instant forcing the Grangers back a step. Harry squared his shoulders and waited for the wards to fall.

The minutes passed as more of the sounds and colours breeched the walls and windows. Tonks and Hermione entered the living room with a trunk hovering behind them. "I got what I could, Harry. I got my wand, I guess I am ready to fight."

Without turning around Harry spoke with a decisive tone and edge to his voice. "Tonks, portkey them home. Stay there and keep them safe incase the house has been found. Call Jules or the elves if you need to. I will stay and fight."

"Harry, I am your guard and I am staying with you. This is not the time to forget everything you have been taught."

"I will not lose more people, Nymphadora. Not to him. I couldn't take it. I will be fine. You know I will be."

"I am not leaving you Harry," Hermione yelled over the increasing noise from outside. She gasped as Harry turned around and look her in the eyes. She saw power flashing in his bright green eyes.

"You must keep your parents safe, Hermione. Family first, 'Mione."

"You are my family, Harry. I am not leaving you."

"I will Stun you and portkey you all away if I have to. Tonks, you know what to do." Harry turned back to watch the door which had begun rattling in its frame as the debate continued.

Tonks sighed and grabbed the nearest pillow. With a bit of thought and a tap, the pillow glowed blue. "Portkey to Potter Estate ready to go. Harry, are you coming with?"

"I am going to meet them at the door, Nymph," Harry announced with force. "I will not run when they threaten my friends, my family. They will pay for this." Harry started to glow lightly.

"You are glowing, again, Harry," Tonks informed him.

"They are almost through, Tonks. Get them out of here, now."

"Everyone, gather around and touch the pillow. Hold on until you land. We will stay right there until Harry shows up. We can't enter the grounds until Harry permits us access."

"Dammit," Harry said before turning around and joining the group. "I knew I forgot something." Harry leveled his wand and started moving it about Jane chanting something really quietly.

"Harry, you are going to be expelled for doing magic," Hermione warned him.

"This is nothing compared to what I am going to do when they make it through." Harry moved through each of the Grangers giving them access to Potter Estate and locking the information away under the proper spells. "You guys can get inside, but don't get near the house. Jules will not let you near it without me."

"Understatement if there ever was one," Tonks quipped while looking very serious.

Harry moved back to the door and waited. The door creaked from the impact of a spell. "Get a move on, Nymph."

"I didn't have time to set it to the number of people," Tonks replied. "It is timed. We only have a minute left."

"They are going to break the door down in about twenty seconds. Promise me you will stay with them."

“Harry now is not the time to make me leave you to these bastards,” Tonks yelled at him.

“They are in for one hell of a fight though.” Harry cracked his neck before putting up an Absolvo Shield. The bright white light bathed the room before the metallic blue of the Imprimis Shield evened it out a bit. Harry growled deeply as he prepared for the wards to fall completely.

“My God, what are those spells and how can he do both of them at once?” Hermione asked no one in particular.

“Absolvo Ancile and Imprimis Patrocinor Shields,’ Tonks answered. “One is wanded while the other is wandless. I would advise that you never piss Harry off enough that he uses those before the fight.”

The door exploded inward and Harry held his ground. The remains of the door and frame impacted Harry shields and disintegrating upon contact. With a shout, Harry raised his wand and the Imprimis Shield fell. Harry cast the Bone Shattering spell followed by a Reductor and the Severing Ribbon as he advanced toward the door.

Hermione gasped as she recognized the first two by sight. She had read up on advanced curses and the Bone Shattering spell was one of the most vicious ones she had read about. The speed and the force of the magic Harry unleashed left her in shock.

As the spells left his wand, a scream could be heard followed by a yell. The last image the Grangers and Tonks saw was a fine mist of red being sprayed into the hallway of the Granger residence and Harry firing spell after spell as he advanced on the intruders outside. The portkey activated and whisked them away from the battle leaving Harry by himself.

Once Harry had begun moving out of what was left of the doorway, he felt himself fall into the same ebb and flow he had used on Monday during his reassessment. Spells flew from his wand as he stepped over three fallen Death Eaters. One was out of the fight since his wand had exploded in his hand leaving no more than a stump where his left hand had been. Another had a gaping wound in his side and the torn flesh revealed a few splintered ribs exposed by the

shredded muscles. The third gripped his neck in an attempt to stop the blood from spraying out of the gash that had been sliced into him.

Harry saw four more Death Eaters firing spells at the house and attacked before they saw him clearly. He leveled his wand at one and fired Conligo Totalus at him. The spell scored a hit and another Death Eater fell. The remaining three saw their attacker as the Absolvo Shield was rather hard to hide even with all the magic flying around.

Harry found himself under fire from the three and at least two of them knew what they were doing. Harry moved and tried to keep all three of them in front of him. One of the skilled fighters began using dark curses in an attempt to break his shield, but Harry held it and attacked the unskilled enemy.

Harry remembered what Horace had said. *'Even a weak opponent is an opponent. Always keep the numbers in your favour.'* Harry remembered that escape was always an option and since the Grangers had left he should leave too. *'They will take the wounded and nothing will have been gained. I am doing okay right now and I will stay and fight until that changes.'*

After a series of Stunners and Reductors, Harry scored a successful hit with one of his Stunning spells. The Death Eater collapsed and was subsequently bound as Harry moved passed him. The two remaining Death Eaters had been retreating as Harry advanced. They had begun to use Unforgivables forcing Harry to stop the offensive and Conjure a marble slab to block the Cruciatus Curses that were flying towards him.

The stone held and his shield remained in place as Harry focused all he could on maintaining them both. The flash of red lit the street and the underside of the older trees that adorned the front yard. The green hue cast by the Dark Mark hovering above the Granger's residence almost gave the battered home a Christmas look. As the attack seemed to wane, Harry watched the techniques the Death Eaters used. They fought as individuals with little or no communication between them.

A few pops let Harry know that other people had arrived and he looked to see who it had arrived. He caught sight of Dumbledore

advancing on the final two followed by Mad Eye and Kingsley. Behind them, Minerva and Bill Weasley could be seen with their wands coming to bear on the Death Eaters.

Knowing that their mission had failed, the two Death Eaters thought one last strike might bring them some level of victory. One cast the Killing Curse and the other launched a fire spell before Disapparating. Harry put most of his effort into the Conjured slab of rock and the little remaining into his Absolvo Shield as he turned away to hide his face in case Moody could see through the spells that were flying at him.

The twisting green light impacted the marble crushing it in a blast of powder and rock against rock sound. The flame spell partially breeched his shield and burnt Harry on the left side. With pain beginning to flood his mind, Harry Summoned the four remaining wands from his defeated foes and forced himself to Apparate away before he could be found out by the Order or passed out from the pain.

As Harry arrived on the grounds of Potter Estate, he looked around for Tonks and the Grangers. He saw them huddled near the front gate with Tonks facing off against an agitated Jules. Harry started to walk towards them while trying to ignore the searing pain racing across his scorched skin. When he neared them, Harry called Jules away. When Jules heard his voice, she ran to him and sniffed anxiously. Only after a loud screech did Jules allow Harry to greet his guests.

The appearance Harry provided must have been rather gruesome judging by the response he received. Jane gasped as David cringed. Hermione screamed and ran to him but was held back by Tonks at the last second.

"You could hurt him worse by touching him," Tonks told the frantic woman.

"What?" Harry asked. "It is just a little burn. No big deal. I didn't even get hit with the Cruciatus Curse so I am fine. Now, let's get you inside where it is safe and warm." Harry turned and led them towards the front door and Jules who had taken up a post in front of the entry.

“Jules, these are my friends and you are to treat them as such.” As an afterthought, he clarified. “You are to treat them better than you have been treating Tonks. Is that understood?” As Jules moved to the side, Harry petted her appreciatively. “Good girl. I am glad we have an understanding. Be nice to them, okay.

“Friends and family, this is my home.” Harry opened the door and ushered them inside while he pocketed the captured wands.

As Albus advanced on the fight, he felt the shield being used by someone to defend themselves against the Death Eaters. He was about to fire a spell at them when they each shot one last spell and Disapparated. Albus watched the spells fly at their intended victim and hoped for a miracle. One was sure to kill if it hit and the other could kill if it hit in the right place.

He watched as the Killing Curse struck the hovering stone and dissipated, but the fire spell hit its target with a flare of heat. The victim turned away from them before he could be seen and Disapparated without a sound.

“Kingsley, Mad Eye, search for others. Bill work on the wards. Minerva, check on the Grangers.” Albus scanned the area and tried to sense the magic used. So many spells had been cast that he couldn’t get a good feel for the people involved. A shout from Kingsley and the flash of a few spells caught his attention.

Albus saw five Death Eaters in various states of spell damage and injuries. Kingsley bound each one before he began preparing portkeys to take them into custody. Mad Eye was scanning the house and surrounding area for any stragglers and found none. Minerva returned from the house empty handed and looking rather shocked at the sight of destruction before her.

“What have we found?” Albus asked.

“Five Death Eaters rather beaten up,” Kingsley yelled from his spot as he readied to portkey them away. “Who ever was here let them have it but good. Two of them might not make it the night.”

“Good for him then,” Mad Eye said in his gruff voice. “I am glad to see not everyone is afraid to hit these bastards in the face when they show it. Everything is clear. A few muggles that need fixing, but it’s nothing the Ministry can’t handle when they get here.”

“The house is empty,” Minerva advised them. “Not a sign of the Grangers or Hermione’s wand and the more advanced books are missing.”

“It would seem that they had advanced notice and an escape route,” Albus surmised. “Ms. Granger would never leave her books if she could help it and especially not ones she hadn’t memorized. Filius still bemoans not getting her in his house.” A cough from Alastor brought the Professor’s attention back to the point at hand.

“Wards are completely destroyed, Professor,” Bill told them. “It will take at least a day or two to recast them not to mention repair the damage to the front door and the outside of the house.”

“We must find out where they are and how they got there,” Albus said. “I will trust all of you to do what you can to fix things. Kingsley, I will leave you to handle the prisoners and intercept the Ministry personnel already on their way. I will try to find out how the Grangers were removed from here and to where.”

As everyone broke into their assigned tasks and set about getting to work, a series of cracks of varying volumes announced the arrival of others. Albus looked at the street to see a group of three grey-cloaked and hooded men and one wearing only a cloak. Every Order member took up a defensive position until Albus waved them down.

“Marcus?” Albus queried.

“Albus Dumbledore,” Marcus said with a smile while holding his wand in a low ready position. The mysterious Ministry employee waved his left hand at his companions and they swiftly moved toward the house and the bound Death Eaters. “I see we have arrived late to this party. Shame, my people were looking forward to having a little fun.”

Albus offered the man a proper smile but stood as tall as he could. "Since when does the Department of Mysteries handle prisoners? I thought you were the research division for the Ministry."

"Oh, Professor," Marcus commented in a soft tone, "We are a research division. We are here to research what these people know. I hope you do not mind us taking them off your hands, Director Shackbolt."

"If I did," Kingsley prompted, "I would have to object to Minister Bones to stop you and you have scene authority over me as it stands right now anyway."

Marcus stowed his wand and clasped his hands together. "So glad to hear that you see things our way, Director. Again, I am most pleased to offer my congratulations to you on your promotion. Now, my associates will be removing these people so they can be cared for and interviewed." The tallest and largest grey-robed man kicked the Stunned Death Eater. "I do hope we aren't delayed in getting them medical attention. That would be a shame."

Seeing his chance, Mad Eye kicked the same man before a second robed figure portkeyed him away. Albus frowned at Alastor but received a pleased smirk in response. "I may not have gotten to cross wands with them, but I hope they get what is coming to them."

"I can assure you, Auror Moody," Marcus explained. "We do not hold their hands. You should not find them wondering about in the near future."

"How did you learn of these events, Marcus?" Albus asked.

"I could ask you the same thing, Professor Dumbledore," Marcus replied. "A muggle neighborhood and with such esteemed company too. Wouldn't you agree that questions are best left unasked this night?"

Albus scanned the Order members and saw that most were unwilling to say anything. They could read between the lines as the robed figures had taken up a crescent formation around them. "I believe that most questions can remain unasked, but I must inquire as to the

whereabouts of the Grangers. I am sure even you understand their significance within the current climate.”

“I believe I understand your meaning,” Marcus answered. “In answer, I have no idea where the Grangers are, but if they are not here then I would think they are safe. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Albus knew that he was dancing on a ledge that could shift at any time. “It would appear that they escaped but I must know to where.”

Marcus smiled in a knowing way before gesturing to his people. All of them Disapparated as one leaving a very confused group in their wake. Albus sighed and Moody moved away. Minerva cleared her throat demanding an answer.

“It would seem that what happened at the Lovegood’s was not a chance occurrence,” Albus surmised. “It would seem that suspicions are confirmed; there are others working against Voldemort. The fact that they have appeared in places where Death Eaters are attacking Harry’s friends seems even more intentional than accidental. Perhaps Harry is working with Amelia in an effort to protect his friends. Or it could all be a coincidence.”

Albus looked over the lawn and the confused faces of his allies. “No matter, we have a job to do here and we shall do it. Harry will not take kindly to the fact that Hermione was threatened and we weren’t able to stop them. The least we can do is fix the damage.” Everyone broke off to carry out their previous assignments.

As Albus worked his magic inside the house, he noticed a missing pillow. It wasn’t his acute sense of decorating that made it catch his eye, but it was the shade of blue the lone remaining pillow displayed that left him wondering where the other one was. An investigation revealed that it was missing from the house entirely and with a recently eaten meal in the icebox and the dishes stowed in the washer told him that more than just the Grangers had been in the house on the fateful night.

‘I really wonder if you have anything to do with this, dear boy. You have proven yourself to be resourceful your entire life, but this

summer you have gone above even your own high standards. How many allies do you have and how are they where they need to be?’

14. Company

As Tonks and the Grangers portkeyed away and landed just outside the gates to Potter Estate, Tonks checked them over for spell damage or any other injuries. Finding none, Tonks sent a message to Marcus with as much speed as she could. *'Harry at the Grangers; multiple death eaters trying to kill him; Help!'*

As the spell left her wand, Tonks turned to see Hermione glaring at her with a look worse than any Jules had ever given her. "Not now, Hermione, we must get inside the grounds right away in case they found the house's location." In a none-to-gentle push, Tonks herded Hermione through the gates with her shocked parents trying their best to keep up.

As they breeched the grounds and the gates closed, Tonks pulled them to the side and stood between them and the house. "This is as far as we dare go without Harry. Keep your voices down and wait."

"Tonks," Hermione said with a nearly cutting tone. "Why did you leave Harry to be killed by those people?"

"Hermione, Harry can take care of himself in situations like those. He has faced Voldemort and lived. I think he can handle a few Death Eaters." As Tonks spoke, her confident front failed and her true concern bled through.

"You don't even believe that rubbish, yet you expect me to believe it?" Hermione fumed and gripped her wand even tighter. She mustered the look of calm rage before speaking as deathly as she ever had in her life. "If Harry dies because you took me away, I will never let you forget it. We should have taken him with us. We could have Stunned him and brought him with."

Tonks shook her head. "Hermione, you and I together couldn't breach Harry's Imprimis Shield if we had twenty minutes let alone the twenty seconds we really had. Not to mention he would have Stunned all of us and portkeyed us away as he threatened." Tonks took a deep breath to calm her mind and body. The stress of her worry for Harry was weighing her down so much that she nearly collapsed. "You heard those three fall before we left. Harry beat three of them

immediately. There couldn't have been that many more. He knows to leave when things get to be too much."

"He never has before," Hermione yelled. "Why would this time be any different? He doesn't know when to run away; he never has. The only way he could leave would be to actually run away. He can't even use the floo without landing on his face." Hermione was flushed red with worry and anger. She was quivering and her wand leaked a few coloured sparks as she worked herself up.

"Harry can create a portkey or he could Apparate," Tonks informed Hermione without thinking. "He is very skilled in transportation. Granted, we haven't worked on floo travel yet, but he has the others down pat."

Hermione prepared to argue the point, but a screech from the far side of the property sounded the impending arrival of Jules and she was not happy. Hermione jumped and leveled her wand at the approaching beast that was at a flat out run towards them. The Grangers moved behind Tonks even further and pulled a resisting Hermione to them to shield her from the attack.

Tonks gasped and raised her wand in case she couldn't stop Jules any other way than yelling at her to stop. "Jules, stop! Harry will be here soon. We aren't going anywhere. We will stay right here until Harry gets here. Remember you have to be nice to me. Harry told you to."

The giant red figure kept her pace until she was nearly on the group. She unfurled her wings stalling her speed and skidded to a stop with her mouth ready to bite Tonks in half.

Much to everyone's relief, Jules didn't attack, but the clearly angry animal kept the group from advancing even one step towards the house. "Jules, we aren't going to move until Harry gets here. You stay there and we will stay here, agreed?"

"Tonks," Hermione shrieked. "Is that a griffin?"

"Yes," Tonks confirmed. "This is Jules and she protects Harry's house worse than any goblin and their money. Do not move. Harry has to let

us in. Jules doesn't like me one bit, and he stopped her from killing me recently. It seems we have weak truce right now."

"Griffins are only extremely violent if they feel threatened or if whatever they are protecting is threatened," Hermione answered as only she could. "They are really rare and amazing creatures too."

"One point for accuracy, Hermione, but she guards the house and Harry. Amazing or not, she will kill us if we try to move."

The group huddled together with Tonks facing Jules and Hermione in the middle. It was Jane's sharp intake of breath and pointing that alerted them to a new arrival. Everyone saw a figure move towards them at a laboured stride. "Tonks?"

"Only Harry can Apparate onto the grounds like that," Tonks explained. "Others can as well but he has to be touching you. The wards prevent it otherwise and they are not fun to run into."

"When did Harry learn to Apparate?"

Tonks sighed as the figure continued approaching. "Recently. He is really good at it. He is silent if he wants to be."

Hermione looked at Tonks as she had an idea what that meant. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am completely sure Harry can Apparate silently." As Tonks finished, Harry called Jules away. The beast screeched once before running to Harry and verifying his identity. When he neared them, Tonks couldn't believe the damage he had suffered and still remained on his feet.

When they entered the house, Harry felt the pain rear up. He grabbed for Tonks' arm to prevent from falling. Harry watched Hermione's face as she restrained herself from rushing to his side and helping him however she could. The Grangers looked on in sympathy as Harry faltered in his steps again and stumbled just inside the front door.

"Tiki!" Tonks yelled into the house. "Harry has been burned. He needs your help!"

Tiki popped into the entryway carrying her medical kit. She looked at him and her face fell. "Harry can't be helped by Tiki. Tiki not good enough to help Harry." The elf started to cry as Dobby came running into the entryway. He only saw his favorite master and ignored the others.

"Harry Potter!" Dobby continued to run to him and looked ready to hug Harry.

Tonks stopped Dobby with her hand. "I had hoped that you had something to heal the burns, Tiki, but since you don't I have little choice. Harry we are going to have to take you to a healer. I need you to create a portkey to them."

Tonks held out the pillow for Harry to enchant. He raised his wand and tapped the pillow. It glowed blue for a second before returning to normal. Hermione's mouth hung wide open as she watched Harry perform a spell she hadn't been able to find in any of her many books.

"Dobby, Tiki," Harry said while fighting the pain. "This is Hermione, Jane, and David Granger. They are guests until further notice. Please take care of them while we are gone." Harry was met with agreement by the elves.

"Tiki," Tonks asked, "I need you to get our grey cloaks immediately, please." Without hesitation, Tiki popped away and returned with two grey cloaks. "Thank you. I am not sure when we will return so make yourselves at home until we get back."

"Where are you taking him?" Hermione demanded as she raised her wand.

"Hermione," Harry said calmly. "I guess I need to go to hospital for this little burn." As he chuckled, he stretched his skin causing a new wave a pain that rippled through his body. The others cringed as they saw the agony he was in.

"No more questions," Tonks ended all debate. "We are going right now." She grabbed the pillow and waited until Harry touched it. As soon as the two people were in contact with the pillow, they disappeared.

“Harry!” Hermione yelled at the bare spot of floor where they had fallen. “You better come back so I can kill you.”

Her parents watched as their daughter yelled at the empty space. “Honey, perhaps we can sit down and wait for them.” Jane assisted her daughter down the hallway and into the living room. Once they were seated, Dobby and Tiki made themselves known.

“Do friends of Master Harry need anything?” Tiki asked.

The Grangers jumped as they hadn’t processed the presence of the beings earlier due to the shock of the evening’s events. “Ah, hello. I am David.”

“Dobby knows you are David. Harry Potter told Dobby. Can Dobby get you something?”

“How about some water, Dobby,” Hermione said as she fought against all the information she had learned. “It might help, I...Dobby? What are you doing here?”

“Dobby is serving Harry Potter. Harry Potter came to Hogwarts and asked Dobby to help. Dobby most happy about helping Harry Potter.” The excitable elf bounced on his feet as he clapped happily.

Tiki pushed Dobby towards the kitchen to get the water and moved into his vacated place in front of the Grangers. “Can Tiki get Master Harry’s friends anything?”

Harry and Tonks appeared on the floor of the team room in the same position they had left the house. Tonks put on her cloak and helped Harry into his before opening the door and yelling for a healer to come to the room. When she turned around, she saw Harry trying to get his feet under him to stand.

“The hell you are,” Tonks rushed to his side and ‘helped’ him stay where he was. “You are not to move until the healer gets here. Do you understand me?”

Harry fought against her tentative resistance and tried to stand again. “I never was very good at listening. Just ask Hermione.” Harry

managed to get to his feet but they were wobbly. He hissed in pain as Tonks held him in place.

"You stubborn man," Tonks scolded. "You know better than this."

"Maybe, but I don't care right now. I will not be on the floor when they come in here. I will not look weak in front of them."

Tonks wanted to comment but couldn't as two healers appeared in the doorway followed by a worried Marcus and a very angry Horace. She was afraid Horace was going to yell at Harry right then, but she was pleased when he saw the damage that had been done and said nothing.

"What spell was it?" The healer asked without waiting.

"No idea," Harry gritted out. "It was a Fire spell of some sort. It was red with some yellow and orange. I was more worried about the Killing Curse at that moment."

"Stretch," commanded the lead healer.

"No," Harry refused. "I will walk there. So let's go."

Tonks held his right arm as they began the slow and painful trip to the medical room. Marcus sighed and smiled as Harry shuffled passed him. Horace held his tongue until only Marcus remained in the room.

As the group entered the medical room, Harry saw a few people in beds along one wall. Each had an Unspeakable standing next to their bed with a wand trained on their chest ready to fire if given a reason. Harry saw a slight shimmer in the middle of the room that seemed to encircle that side of beds. Every Unspeakable looked at Harry as he continued on to the next available bed.

Tonks helped him into the bed only to be shoved away by a force of three healers that moved to care for him. Tonks noticed that the Death Eaters were unattended by medical staff and couldn't stop the urge to advance on them. She drew her wand and rushed at the nearest person in a bed with a black cloak at the foot of it.

The guard moved to the side giving her a clear shot. She saw a man in his early twenties with his left arm completely destroyed. He was unconscious and blood slowly oozed from the wound. As she fought with her emotions, she let out a yell, lowered her wand, and moved it to her left hand. She took the last few steps and punched the man in the face. The resultant snap told her that she had broken his nose as blood began running from the fractured body part. "Fucker!"

"Chamel," Marcus spoke softly but clearly. "I believe Ceps did enough damage the first time around, but who am I to stop you. I will say that he is the most likely to live of those injured. So whatever that information does for you..."

"How many were there?" Tonks demanded.

"We have five," Marcus said with all the calm of a statue. "I am not sure how many got away, but what I would like to know is why he was there and where you were?"

Tonks tried to control her anger before answering. "We need to be alone for that conversation, Marcus."

"I agree," Marcus said. "Let's go to my office and discuss it. Ceps will be treated well. It looks like they are about to give him some Dreamless Sleep potion while they repair the burns."

Harry watched Tonks and Marcus leave the room while Horace took up a position near the door. Through the gritted teeth and set jaw, Harry thought he saw a twinkle in his eyes. Once the potion had been poured down his throat, Harry started feeling the effects. As his eyes started feeling heavy and his focus drifted, he heard a few voices in the room.

"Was he alone?"

"Five is pretty good even if they are newbies."

"Not sure if my guy is going to make it. A lot of damage to his chest."

"Let them all die. Attack one of our own, even the new guy, and you deserve death."

“I wonder how many there were in total.”

As Harry drifted off to sleep, he managed to say one word, “Seven.” Everyone in the room heard the answer and perked up a little. Horace left his place against the wall intending to join Marcus and Chamel.

The sterile smell assaulted his senses as Harry awoke. Once his eyes opened, he looked to the side of the room where the Death Eaters had been. Only one person remained in bed and he had two Unspeakables guarding him.

“Nearly healed the damage to his ribs,” a healer said out loud.

“Too bad,” a large grey-cloaked man said. “I was hoping he was going to die. One less shite to worry about.”

The healer ignored the comment and moved her wand over the patient. With a soft flash of white, the Death Eater moved and his eyes snapped opened. In a blink of his eyes, Harry watched the Death Eater grab the healer’s wand and wrestle it out of her hand. She fought with him for a few seconds before one of the guards pulled her free.

“Avada Kedavra,” said the large Unspeakable. The sickly green light leapt from his wand and struck the Death Eater in the chest ending his life instantly. “Well, that is that then. Didn’t know when to stop I guess.”

“Thank you, Thor,” the healer thanked. “I shouldn’t have gotten so close. I know better.”

“Don’t worry about it, Mimi,” Thor waved off the thanks. “It was my pleasure.”

Harry looked at the dead young man and felt a sick weight in his stomach. It wasn’t the fact that he saw someone killed that bothered him; it was the fact that it didn’t affect him like the other deaths he had been witness to. He saw the purpose in killing the man. He knew why it happened and the reasons behind it. It hurt him to think it, but Harry looked at the still body and sighed in relief. Another enemy left the ranks of Voldemort for good.

The rear door swung open striking the wall opposite of it as another woman walked in at a hurried pace. "What in the bloody hell is going on in here?"

"Unbunch your knickers, Speers," Thor said. "Bastard got a hold of Mimi's wand. I had no choice."

"Of all the stupid things," Speers yelled. "Mimi you know better than to get that close. Now I have a dead patient and an Operative going on Administrative Leave pending an investigation. What a buggered evening this is turning out to be."

"Speers," Horace said from the main entrance. "I saw the whole thing. There is no need for an investigation as it was justified. Wouldn't you agree, Ceps?" Horace turned on his feet to look right at Harry.

Seeing him awake, Mimi grabbed her wand out the dead Death Eater's hand and rushed to him to check him over. Once the exam was done, the healer stepped back and handed Harry a light yellow potion. "It is for the lingering pain from the burn. You will be tender for a day or so. Get a lot of rest and keep the new skin exposed so it can acclimate to the air. There is no risk of infection now but stay clean all the same. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Harry answered. "And yes, Horace, it was justified. He was going to kill anyone he could."

Horace smirked and returned his wand to its hiding place. "Glad to see you are coming around to our thinking, Ceps. Come, Marcus needs a few words with you before you leave."

Harry sighed and swung his feet off of the bed. He sat up and steadied himself before standing. He swayed and Mimi reached to help him, but Harry waved it off. He fought against the vertigo and forced his mind on the task at hand. As the dizzy feeling passed, Harry took a few tentative steps towards Horace. Once he felt more confident, Harry increased his strides and aimed for the door.

He held his head high as he passed Thor and the other Unspeakable. They nodded to him as he continued by. When he neared Horace, Harry checked for his wand and found it missing. He slowed and

looked at the table near his bedside. Seeing the wand he Summoned it into his hand and stowed it in his cloak in one smooth action. "Lead the way, Horace."

"This way, Ceps," Horace spoke calmly but with a slight edge. Once in the hallway, Horace spoke again. "A little theatrical, don't you think?"

"I am the new guy," Harry reasoned. "I need all I can get to earn their respect. If I need to be a little flashy, so be it. I am sure you can understand that."

Horace snorted once, "That I do, Ceps. Now you had better keep up. If you fall behind, I will have medical take you for another two hours."

Harry quickened his steps to match Horace to avoid learning if the threat was real or not. "I was only in there for two hours?"

"It's magic for a reason, Ceps. Are you a wizard or a muggle?"

"Depends on the day, Horace. What is going on? Where is Chamel?"

"Waiting for us. You have some questions to answer. I will tell you that the five new...ah, four new prisoners will help your position. Just answer the questions and you can get back home."

Harry tried to settle his mind as they approached Marcus's office. When the door swung open, Harry entered to find Cal standing in the corner near Marcus and Tonks sitting in a chair. She looked up at Harry and he saw the relief wash over her. She took a deep breath and let it out in a cleansing way.

"I am so glad you are healthy, Ceps," Marcus said as he took his seat motioning for Harry to sit next to Tonks. "We are all here to debrief after the events of tonight. Since Cal has come in at the end, I feel he should be caught up. Would you care to do that, Ceps?"

"Ah, not really."

"I will," Tonks jumped in. "We were at a location, socially, and it was attacked by a group of Death Eaters. I was ordered by Ceps to take

those present to a safe location. I did as I was ordered. Shortly after, Ceps arrived at the safe location and I brought him here for treatment.”

“Wonderful summation of the events as you know them, Chamel,” Marcus gestured to Harry prompting him to fill in the details.

Sighing, Harry gathered his thoughts. “After Chamel left, the wards fell on the place we were at. I attacked three from the start and continued fighting. I beat two more before the last two started using only Unforgivables. I had to defend to stay alive. I heard people arrive and the Death Eaters fired two final spells at me. I stopped the Killing Curse, but a Fire spell made it through. I was injured and left the area. That is what happened.”

“The chest guy was killed in an attempt to escape just now,” Horace said. “Thor added another to his list, but it was unavoidable. I suggest he be cleared to continue his work.”

Marcus put some thought into the matter. “Agreed. We have so few with his skills in the first place. To avoid future situations, such as these, full stasis is to be maintained on all prisoners in the medical room. As for my part, those who arrived at the end were a rather assorted group of people. I believe you know who they were, Ceps?”

“Yes, I know who they were and why they were there,” Harry looked to Tonks before returning his gaze to Marcus. “I assume they asked a lot of questions.”

“You would be correct. They were the most interesting questions since their answers mattered little to the one asking them.” Marcus smiled at Harry as he paused. “I believe he is putting certain things together, Ceps. Damage control may be required in the near future.”

“I will see what happens.” Harry looked at the floor trying to figure a way out of his current situation. “How did you guys get the Death Eaters with the others there first?”

“I can be quite persuasive, Ceps.” Marcus smiled a brightly fake smile. “It was our presence that got the wheels turning if you understand my

meaning. My suggestion, use the known facts to your advantage. You are well connected publicly, use that to shield us.”

“Yes, Marcus, I will if I have to.” Harry looked to Cal who was watching the scene before him. As he looked back to Marcus wearing an anxious expression, Marcus spoke up.

“Everything spoken of here is to be kept here,” Marcus gave Cal a pointed look which was understood. “Certain people can put together details to learn things they aren’t meant to know.”

Cal spoke for the first time. “I know what you are saying, all of you. I can keep my wonderings private. I will say that I am missing out on the fun though. This makes it two times I wasn’t allowed to play. A lesser man would think that I am being left out for a reason.”

“I can tell you that isn’t how it is, Cal,” Harry clarified. “This is just my luck at its finest.”

“Ten Death Eaters,” Cal offered. “Rotten luck at best unless you want them around.”

“And I don’t, but there they are all the time.” Harry felt his strength waver as the potions he had taken began to fade. Horace had stared at Harry the whole time they had been in the office. Harry felt that he deserved an explanation and gave it directly to Horace. “I wasn’t going to let them destroy that place. I wasn’t going to run. I fought as I have been taught too. I held my own until the end. My focus wavered and I got hurt. I left the instant that I could ensure it wasn’t for nothing. If I had left any sooner, they would have taken their injured and nothing would have been gained for all the risk.”

Horace held Harry’s stare before responding. “All things considered, you did an acceptable job tonight. Only next time, do not get hurt and get the last two. An Anti-Apparition ward would have been enough to stop them from escaping.”

“I don’t know that spell,” Harry replied.

"Something to add to the never-ending list then, Ceps," Horace gritted out. "Perhaps you should apply yourself a little more so you aren't so helpless in future situations."

Harry pushed down on his anger as it flared. He knew it showed in his eyes as Cal took notice and reacted to it but Horace held his ground. Tonks stood and placed a hand on his shoulder urging him to calm down. With a grunt, Harry stood and left the room with Tonks on his uninjured side.

"Ever the thorn," Marcus said to Horace. "I think he did admirably tonight. You needn't press him further. Five out of seven, alone, is a wonderful accomplishment."

"He could have done better," Horace defended his comments. "He can be the best if he is pushed to it. I will not let him achieve less than his best. It would be my failure if that happens."

"What of our mission later today?" Cal asked.

"Delayed due to Medical's orders," Marcus informed Cal. "So far, Ceps has been proving himself in real life situations without the need for a simulated mission."

"Then give us a real mission," Cal suggested. "Ceps seems to hold his own well enough. I am sure we will get some good intel from the four new prisoners."

"We will see, Cal," Marcus offered. "We might be able to give you something good to look into."

"Sounds like something to look forward to." Cal turned and left the room closing the door behind him.

"Held his own against seven Death Eaters. I am most pleased with our selection my dear friend."

"Jump up and down on your own, Marcus. You have always been too easy to please. He nearly died though. That is what worries me the most. He should have been able to stop both spells easily enough."

“Perhaps he overcompensated,” Marcus offered. “The Killing Curse is a most intimidating spell to face. He has seen it at work and knows of its abilities. You might need to teach him how to feather his magic when doing two separate spells. You never showed him how to balance the Conjuring and his shields.”

“It isn’t like he has limited power and I have to teach him to balance it,” Horace defended his teachings. “He can throw magic at both spells and still have some left over. Maybe he was too focused and lost sight of the big picture. Maybe he focused on the Killing Curse and ignored the Fire spell. Either way, he has a long way to go before he is safe out there.”

“Oh my paranoid friend,” Marcus said with a laugh. “None of us are safe out there, him especially. The fact that he is still with us tells me that he has that ‘something special’ to him. Tell Chamel that they have today off from training. He needs his rest so the skin will heal properly. And you mentioned something about Team Two.”

“They heard and saw everything in Medical. Thor wanted to kill all of the Death Eaters for attacking one of our own.”

“One group has accepted him already.” At Horace’s scowl, Marcus clarified. “One group has showed some acceptance to him being a member of our family. I am quite hopeful for the future.”

“You being the optimist, forgive me for not dancing around like an idiot at your prediction.”

Harry and Tonks arrived in the entryway, holding their cloaks, and set them on an empty chair before walking to the living room. When they entered, Harry saw Dobby talking with Hermione and Tiki conversing with the elder Grangers.

“Harry,” Hermione said happily before her face changed to one of frustration similar to the looks she would give when she wanted to know something and wasn’t getting it. “You have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Good to see you too, Hermione,” Harry answered before moving into a place across from the Grangers. Tonks took up a spot next to him

and smiled at the amazed looks David and Jane gave when they looked for the burns.

"Magic is quite handy when it comes to healing," Tonks offered. "Wouldn't you agree?" She rubbed Harry's right arm in a caring way and caught his eye. She sighed when she realized how close he had come to really getting hurt and managed to survive it.

"Harry Potter is better?" Dobby asked as he rushed to Harry's side pulling up right before he hit him.

"I am better, Dobby," Harry said with a smile. "Thank you for helping me out and everything."

"That is what Dobby does, Harry Potter."

"Harry," Hermione prompted in an impatient way. "How are you? What is going on? Where did you learn all that magic? How are you not expelled? Is my home still there?" Her parents hugged her as she deflated.

"I am fine, but the house is a little banged up," Harry admitted hanging his head. "I am sorry about that but don't worry. I will get it repaired and have new wards put up. Everything will be as good as new when I am done." His serious smile and contrite manner told them he was determined to carry out his promise. "The Death Eaters attacked you because you are my friend. If you want to distance yourself from me I will understand."

"Harry," Hermione snapped at him. "Shut up. I am not going to distance myself from you for any reason. In case you haven't figured it out, I would still be on Voldemort's list even if you weren't my best friend. I am muggle-born and he hates me for it. Enough of that kind of talk. Now answer my other questions."

"I learned the magic because I have little choice in the matter," Harry explained. "I am fighting for my life here and every spell counts. I wasn't expelled because the Ministry can't track me any more. That problem was remedied recently and I am taking advantage of it. I think we are protected here, but I am not positive on that."

"Master James did magic all the time during summers," Tiki said. "Most was mischief magic. Paul tell me about the worst times."

Harry laughed at the images he got in his head of his father causing trouble around the house. "See, you are just like him," Tonks hugged Harry and laughed. "One other thing you got from him besides your hair and good looks."

"We have company, Tonks," Harry chided as he returned the hug happily. "I am really sorry about everything that has happened Mr. and Mrs. Granger."

"Harry," David spoke calmly while holding Jane's hand in Hermione's lap. "We talked while you were away. Our daughter was more worried about you than any of the other things. She did go off on some tangent about elf rights or something or other, but I am not sure what that is about."

"Didn't you listen, dad?" Hermione asked. "I told you all about it one summer."

"Honestly, honey," David tried to smooth things over, "I wasn't sure what it was about. I have never seen a house elf before. It is kind of hard to understand what is going on without seeing what you are talking about. The elves here seem happy." David pointed to Tiki and Dobby who smiled happily as they moved about the room straightening things or cleaning.

"Well," Hermione backtracked, "Harry treats them like family. Don't you Harry?"

"I try Hermione, but they resist my every effort." Harry sighed and felt his body weaken even more. Tonks felt his exhaustion and cleared her throat.

"Harry is really tired and needs rest." Tonks stood and helped Harry to his feet. "I need to get him to bed now or he will never go if he gets a second wind."

"You need places to stay," Harry perked up as he thought about his guests. "We have some rooms upstairs. We can show you to them so just follow us if you will."

Harry walked up the stairs with Tonks' help and found the hallway much longer than it had been. A doorway was where the window used to be. Another complete hallway had materialized in the house and he could see multiple doors leading away from the main corridor. "Tiki?" Harry hesitated in front of the door to his room. "Um, this is our room in case you need us for anything. Unless it has changed too."

"What do you mean, Harry?" Hermione asked.

Tonks answered, "This wasn't here before. We don't know where it came from."

Tiki popped into existence before them. "Yes, Harry."

"Tiki, where did this hallway come from?" Harry asked as he visibly leaned on Tonks for support.

"It is the guest wing," Tiki said as if it was common sense. "Harry has guests, Tiki open the guest wing. Did Tiki do something wrong?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that, Tiki," Harry said. "I just didn't know it was there. Was there a spell or something hiding it?"

"Tiki not sure, Harry. Tiki just allow it to be seen. Rooms all clean and ready for Grangers to choose. Tiki and Dobby clean them tonight."

"Thank you for thinking ahead, Tiki," Harry offered with a smile. "What would I do without you?" Tiki smiled and lowered her head as she mumbled something quietly. Harry was going to ask what she said, but Tonks moved him forward. "Um, right, well pick out what ever rooms you want."

Hermione chose the first one on the left, and her parents chose the first one on the right. The rooms were identical except for their colour scheme and furniture design. There were four rooms on each side of the hallway and a loo was shared between two rooms. Hermione's room looked like it had been taken right out of Hogwarts. The

Granger's room looked to be more classic and updated with modern touches.

Harry leaned into Tonks both out of weariness and to ask her a question. "Why couldn't they have just stayed in the two guest rooms near us?"

"Ask Tiki," Tonks suggested since she didn't know the answer.

Harry asked Tiki and the elf dropped her head and turned red. "Tiki not sure Harry wants answer." At his insisting, Tiki gave him the reason. "Harry and Tonks are noisy at night and the morning. Tiki not sure Harry and Tonks want guests to hear them."

Harry went red from the very honest answer he had received. "Ah, I guess we haven't been discrete, Nymph. Perhaps we should work on being quieter."

"I think not, Harry," Tonks said with conviction. "We will just have to use Silencing spells on our room. I am not about to stop having fun with you."

Harry was going to correct his point, but Hermione left her room and joined them in the hallway. "Harry, I am not sure if I said this, but thank you for saving us. I don't think I could have protected my parents for very long. You saved our lives. Thank you." She moved forward and hugged him tightly. Harry returned the hug and ignored the irritated stretching of his skin from the contact.

"I will do what I can to keep you all safe." Harry sighed as Hermione let go. "I am just glad I was there to help. I am the reason you were targeted in the first place." He held up his hand stalling her objection. "You know I am right so don't bother denying it. I understand how it is and I am not getting down on myself. Tonks has helped me get past that. I accept what is going on and my role in it. Now, get some sleep. We might be gone when you get up, but we will be back."

"We are going to be here," Tonks corrected. "We have all day to rest and relax. You getting hurt changed our plans."

Harry understood Tonks' meaning and let the subject go. He smiled at Hermione and to her parents who stood in their doorway looking confused. When he turned to go to his room, his legs gave out enough that Tonks had to catch him.

"You're almost like I normally am, Harry," Tonks joked as she helped Harry into their room. She pulled his ratted shirt off and eyed the new and shiny skin. "A bit fresh but I think I can put up with it for a day or so." She removed the remainder of his street clothes and put him into bed. When she snuggled into his right shoulder, Harry sighed and hugged her to him.

"Thank you for helping out, Nymph." Harry closed his eyes and took in the sensations of her against him after a long and trying day. "I know you didn't want to leave but if you hadn't they could have been killed. I can't let them get hurt because of me. That is one of the promises I made at the beginning of the summer. You allowed me to keep it tonight. I don't know what I would do without you."

"You would be boring, dull, stuck in at Privet Drive, terrible with women, scared of kissing..."

"I was never scared of kissing," Harry argued weakly. "I was always willing to give it a shot. Then you came along and proved it was as much fun as everyone said it was."

"See, without me you would be completely lost. I am the best thing that has ever happened to you." Tonks smirked as she kissed Harry lightly before putting more into it. As she slowly slid down his body, Tonks smiled her most sexy smile. "Don't forget to Silence the room, Harry."

Harry enjoyed every second of her attention as he reacted immediately to it. "I thought I would be too tired and hurt for this."

"Who said we were going to shag?" Tonks disappeared under the covers as she offered Harry a little of what to expect.

"Oh, I like that," Harry said before casting a Silencing spell on the room.

Tonks made quick work of Harry as she knew he desperately needed to get some rest. Afterwards, they cuddled up and went to sleep peacefully.

Hermione awoke as her parents entered her room. They tried to be quiet, but they hadn't been successful in many years. Hermione opened her eyes just enough to see them holding each other and watching her intently. She wondered what they were on about, but as a tear rolled down her mother's face she knew it was something big.

"Mum?" Hermione asked as she sat up looking worried. She watched both of them as they tried to hide their emotions but failed.

"Oh, don't mind me, honey," Jane dismissed what Hermione had seen by quickly wiping at her eyes. "It is nothing."

"It is not nothing, mum," Hermione told her defiantly. "You only cry when it is something. What is it? Is Harry alright?" Sudden panic raced through her body as she looked around the room for some indication to her parent's sadness.

"Oh, Hermione," Jane prefaced. "It is just that we came so close to losing you last night. We came so close to losing our family. It really hit me when I woke up and your father thought it would do me some good seeing that you were fine. Obviously, it didn't have the intended affect."

"Oh, mum," Hermione said while fighting her own fears from the night before. "I am fine. I am always fine when you are around."

"You give us too much credit, sweetie," David said. "It was Harry who did the most last night. Without him, I don't know what would have happened."

Hermione took a breath and let it out as she thought about the events of the night before. "I do. We would have been killed as a message to all muggleborns and to Harry especially. It would have crushed him. He may look tough, but he is very fragile emotionally. He has had such a terrible life. He doesn't know how to deal with some things when they happen."

“He seemed pretty tough last night, dear,” Jane reminded. “He took charge of things and saved us. I didn’t see any weakness in him.”

“Oh, mum, it was there,” Hermione corrected her loving mother as she sat on the bed. “He is really good at hiding it, though. I saw how worried he was about us. I saw how scared he was inside. You have always told me that he seemed reckless with his life when I told you stories. Well, he seems reckless because he has never had someone to worry about him. I was the first person to make him look at things before he jumped in. I may seem like a nag, but I do it to keep him safe. I think he appreciates it not that he will ever admit to it. He is a boy after all and that would be unmanly.”

Her father had the decency to nod in agreement with her statement. “Like I said before, almost too smart for your own good.”

“Ha,” Hermione laughed. “You two are responsible for that.” With another deep breath, Hermione focused on the present. “We need to concentrate on the here and now. Don’t worry about what could have happened. We are safe and Harry made that happen. If I worried about every time Harry could have died, I would do nothing else. Being his friend teaches you to think past the dangers and onto the good things in life. Now, I should get up. There is still a lot he hasn’t told me that I want to know.”

Seeing the determined look on their daughter’s face, Jane and David stepped back and allowed her to hurry into her attached bathroom. When she returned, Jane told her that they hadn’t seen Harry yet.

Hermione scoured the house looking at everything she could find. She forced herself out of the library using all of her will power to achieve it. She found a happy Hedwig at the top of the tower and gave her an owl treat she had found in the school cloak she was wearing. Her adventures led her to stand before Harry’s door. She knocked and waited for a response. Receiving none, Hermione tried the handle and it turned smoothly unlatching the door.

Ignoring her inner voice cautioning her against entering, Hermione slipped into the room. She found it warm and inviting and quite comfortable. Her eyes looked out of the window and fell on Jules who

was trotting around the grounds chasing a small animal in what looked like a game.

When she spied the bed, she drew her wand and aimed it at the woman in it. Hermione had never seen her before and wondered what happened to Tonks. As those thoughts appeared, Hermione put the pieces together. She saw Harry, a rather well put together Harry, sleeping soundly with his arm around the unknown woman.

As her mind worked, Hermione figured that the woman had to be Tonks. For some reason, Tonks looked the way she did. Not knowing what to do, Hermione stood where she was and watched the pair sleep. She felt the heat increase in her face as she noticed the sheet slide down as the couple moved together. Tonks' shoulder was completely uncovered and Hermione could see that she wasn't wearing a top. *'Close my arse, Harry.'*

Tonks felt a tickle in her nose and twitched it trying to end the annoyance. Only succeeding in making matters worse, Tonks opened her eyes and rubbed at the offending hair from her head that was disturbing her sleep. She caught sight of Hermione standing perfectly still and wearing a look of amazement. Deciding on having some fun, she acted.

"I do the same thing when he is without a shirt, Hermione," Tonks joked softly hearing a sharp intake of breath in response. "Quite a sight isn't he?"

"Tonks?" Hermione questioned.

"Yes, who else do you think would be in his bed?" Tonks saw Hermione point at her hair in answer. "Oh, sorry, Harry likes me in my normal form. He says I am pretty even though I don't see it. I think he is a bit touched in the head if you know what I mean."

With a thought, Tonks reverted back to her normal disguise. Harry held her tightly before groaning and waking up. "Something wrong Harry?"

"Something isn't right, Nymph," Harry said opening his eyes. He looked in Tonks' face seeing the hair change, and then he looked under the sheets. "Why did you change?"

Tonks tilted her head in Hermione's direction. Following it, Harry looked to see a familiar blur standing in his room. "Oh, hi Hermione. I guess I didn't lock the door last night. This is the first time we have had guests so I am sure you can understand." Harry Summoned his glasses into his hand and put them on. When Hermione gasped, Harry scanned the room quickly. "What is it?"

"You did magic without a wand," Hermione pointed out both eager and shocked.

"Oh," Harry acknowledged. "Yeah, I do that sometimes now. Really handy when I don't have my wand around." Harry saw Hermione working through her surprise and focusing on him and Tonks as a knowing look graced her visage. "Um, Hermione, could you give us a minute to get dressed?"

Hermione smirked as Harry asked for her to leave. While he was talking, Tonks had begun to pull on the sheet exposing his chest as he spoke. "Nymph, stop it. You are incorrigible you know that."

"That wasn't what you said last night, Harry," Tonks joked as she squinted hungrily at him. "I believe your exact words were..."

"We have company, Nymph," Harry interrupted as he put his hand over her mouth. He looked at Hermione and blushed. "If you could excuse us please. She is dreadful in the morning." Harry made a face as Tonks licked his hand. He wiped it on the sheets giving her a warning look that said he was annoyed and enjoyed every second of her teasing.

"It looks to me that she is rather frisky, not dreadful, in the morning, Harry," Hermione chided before she left the room in a fit of giggles.

"Between the both of you," Harry complained, "I don't stand a chance. Do I?"

“Not even an inkling, Harry,” Tonks said as she slid on top of him and began kissing him passionately. “You are doomed and it is best to accept that fact. Besides, you know that you have to keep that skin exposed today so it heals properly. We are in for a show today I tell you.” Harry groaned before flipping Tonks on her back and showing her that even beaten, he still had some fight left in him.

As they walked into the kitchen, the elves hurried about getting brunch step up. The Grangers sat at the table talking about how they were going to fix the house and keep their business running. Hermione watched Harry closely as he held Tonks’ hand until they had to sit down. Tonks and Hermione shared a smile that made Harry wary of their thoughts.

“I will take care of all repairs, David,” Harry offered without showing any willingness to accept help or assistance. “It is the least I can do. We can go to Gringotts and arrange it. I have a few other matters to attend to as well.”

“We have insurance, Harry,” David said. “It is our house in the first place.”

“No need,” Harry waved off the offer as he took his share of the pancakes and eggs Dobby presented to him. “I have more than enough money to handle the costs. I plan to secure your business as well as you two spend so much time there. I do not want our problems to disrupt your life more than they already have.”

Harry paused as he saw Dobby directing his knife and fork to cut up the pancakes in his normal way. The bacon had found a place away from the syrup that poured itself generously onto his plate. Harry made a face that got Tonks laughing.

“Dobby started doing that the second he got here, didn’t you Dobby?” Tonks asked with a smile. Dobby nodded and moved back to the cooker. “Always wanted to do that for Harry at school.”

“Odd sort he is,” Harry said while looking at Dobby out of the corner of his eye. “Between you and him I will be carted off in months. Mark my words.”

Hermione laughed and pointed out that if it hadn't happened by now it was never going to happen. Her parents joined in the humour while trying to refuse his goodwill, but Harry wasn't having any of it.

Breakfast finished, Harry gave everyone a tour of the grounds spending a particularly long amount time on the Quidditch pitch. Tonks convinced Harry to fly around on his broom and show the Grangers what he could do. Tonks had fun commenting on his form as he flew without a shirt. His new skin shone in the sun as he exerted himself testing his limits on the broom after his recent medical treatment.

Hermione had to avert her eyes a few times, which Tonks caught, to keep from going bright red. David and Jane were amazed by Harry's skill and talent. Harry flew by a few times to try and coax Hermione to fly with him, but she was adamantly against the idea. Tonks deferred as well citing her last flight as reason enough to stay on the ground.

As Harry practiced with the snitch, Tonks moved next to Hermione. "So, Hermione, are you having fun?"

"I am enjoying myself," Hermione commented. "You know he is doing this to avoid answering my questions. He is entertaining my parents and hoping I will forget what I want to know."

"Is he really?" Tonks asked while trying too hard to act surprised. "He does have a way about him doesn't he? Do not press him for answers he may not be able to give you."

"Harry can tell me anything," Hermione said with force. "He can trust me. He has always been able to trust me."

"It has nothing to do with trust, Hermione," Tonks explained. "Some things he can't tell you or anyone else."

"Can he tell you?" Hermione challenged while staring Tonks down.

"Only the things I already know about. Please, if Harry tells you he can't say leave it at that. There are some things best left unknown. You have to trust me on that and him when he tells you."

"I will keep it in mind, Tonks," Hermione relented before attacking. "So, what is going on with you and Harry?"

"Harry has been a gentleman since I got to the Dursley's," Tonks said with a slight smile and a faraway look. "He is the first guy I have been with that has wanted me to be me and not someone else."

"Is that why you looked the way you did this morning?"

"Yes, that is how I really look without any morphing. Harry asked me to show him once and it was the way he reacted that got me. He was so sincere and honest that I started doing it more often. As you could tell, he is used to me being me when we are here."

Hermione thought about what Tonks had said and compared it to the Harry she knew. "That sounds like Harry. Can I assume that you and Harry have been intimate then?"

Tonks smiled widely at her. "You can think whatever you want, Hermione. I am not going to tell you our bedroom secrets." Tonks smirked and cocked her eyebrow at the irritated look Hermione gave her.

"Oh, now I know you have spent too much time with Harry. He can infuriate you and endear himself all at the same time." Hermione sighed and lowered her voice. "I am being serious, how close are you two. I care about him and if he gets hurt because of you..."

Tonks patted her shoulder while answering in complete seriousness. "With my life, I will keep him safe, Hermione. All you need to know is that I care about him more than you can see. In all honesty, how could I not?"

"That is the Harry I know," Hermione said with superiority. "That is his real magic." They laughed together knowing exactly what they were talking about. As Harry made a dangerously fast dive and pulled up right before hitting the ground, Dave and Jane applauded. "And I see that he has entranced my parents as well."

Tonks watched Harry move around the pitch fighting against gravity and the air to reach the snitch. "Looking like that, it is hard to think of

anyone who wouldn't fall under his spell." She watched Hermione look away purposefully from Harry's body as he flew around. "Enough about my feelings for Harry, what about your feelings for him?"

Hermione shook her head and looked into Tonks' eyes. "He is my best friend. You could say he is like my brother."

"Ha, you do not look at your brother like that."

Hermione calmed herself before answering as if she was in class. "I am merely observing a person who has many attributes that I find appealing. There is nothing more to it than that. And, I would appreciate it if you left it at that, Tonks. Harry doesn't need to worry about my intentions towards him. I am the most reliable part of his life and he needs that."

Tonks weighed what Hermione had said before answering. "Actually, Hedwig is the most reliable part of his life. I will give you second place though. I hope to be third, but we both know I like a little chaos now and then. And getting Harry frustrated really gets him going where it counts if you know what I mean."

Before she had a chance to respond, Hermione found Harry landing in front of them. He smiled at her before giving Tonks a longing look that expressed his affection for her. "I am tired now. I guess I'm not one hundred percent yet."

"They told you one to two days at least, Harry." Tonks smiled while messing his hair and hugging his slightly sweaty form. "We should take it easy the rest of the day so you can finish healing."

"Tonks," Harry waved off her concern. "I am fine. Besides, I need to go to Gringotts and arrange things for the Grangers. Your lives don't need to be disrupted any more than they already have been. The sooner we get it taken care of the sooner you can get back to a normal life. We can leave in half an hour or so?"

"When do you plan to send us back home?" Hermione asked looking at her worried parents.

“After the house has been fixed, the wards repaired and new ones added,” Harry said. “Dumbledore will do his thing, but I plan to have the goblins add more protections. I have to keep my friends safe.”

Harry led the way back to the house with Tonks keeping the Grangers occupied so Hermione could speak with him. “Harry, I want to know how you can use magic and not get caught. You couldn’t even cast accidental magic and get away with it before.”

“They can’t monitor me anymore, Hermione. Like I said before, you might be able to cast magic here and not get into trouble. Go ahead and try if you want to.”

Hermione kept asking questions as they walked and received more and more refusals to answer them. Her patience depleted about the same time they entered the house. Harry cleaned up and put on the lightest shirt he had before donning his grey cloak and changing the colour to a deep blue.

When he walked back into the living room, Harry saw Tonks giving Hermione pointers on casting the Fortis Aegis shield. Hermione hadn’t cast the spell yet, but she looked close to trying it. Tonks had overcome Hermione’s normally reserved nature and fear of trouble to get her practicing magic.

As Harry watched, Hermione mimicked Tonks’ wand movements and words exactly. When Hermione had it down, Tonks urged her to try the spell. With David asking to see some real magic again, his daughter did the spell. A light and cloudy grey shield formed quickly but faded almost as fast.

When Harry saw the determined scowl stretch across his best friend’s face, he knew she was going to practice until she got the spell right. He watched her try repeatedly until the shield appeared with a clear grey hue to it. Hermione smiled a satisfied smile as she accepted a hug from her mother in congratulations.

“Well done, Hermione,” Harry acknowledged her effort.

“Oh, Harry, you have to teach me the other spells you have learned this summer. I want to know those other shields.”

Her joy at learning was exposed for everyone to see. "I might think about it, Hermione," Harry teased. "But you are such a slow learner it might take all summer to teach you the other three shields." Harry's joking was returned by Hermione in the form of a Stinging hex. Harry reacted with a wandless casting of the Fortis shield stopping the Stinger instantly.

"You know better than to challenge me in learning stuff," Hermione replied. "And how can you do that? It takes years to learn wandless magic even for the most basic spells. I have a book on it at home that I ordered last year."

"Um," Harry thought, "Maybe I don't read about what I can't do. I just do it and find out later that I wasn't supposed to. Sound about right, Tonks?"

"That sounds about right all things considered," Tonks admitted while giving Harry a one-armed hug. "Are you sure you want to go to Gringotts today? Things can wait until tomorrow you know."

"It needs done now so the Grangers can get back to their lives," Harry said. "Before we go I need to make a few things understood. I was not at your house yesterday and neither was Tonks. Let's say that someone stopped by and warned you. Then you were transported somewhere, don't give a place, and then you were sent to me. I don't want people to know I can do magic and I especially don't want certain people to know I was the one fighting at your house. Any other questions refer them to me or Tonks. Dumbledore will want to know who and what, but he can't know the answers."

"Harry," Hermione switched into her normal tone. "Dumbledore can help us. He can take care of things like this."

"Like he has done thus far?" Harry asked evenly letting her think about the answer. "I do not have faith that Albus can fix things anymore. Too much has fallen through the cracks and people have died because of it. I will do what I will do, and he can do the same. I can't afford to rely on him moving forward. I have lost too much by trusting him completely."

“Harry,” Hermione tried to reason with him, but Tonks stalled her objections.

“Harry has every right to his opinions about Dumbledore, Hermione,” Tonks spoke firmly. “A lot has happened this summer that you don’t know yet and it might be best if you left it that way. I used to trust him like you do, but now I know that he is just a man doing his best. Sometimes, his best isn’t enough considering who we are up against.”

“Hermione,” Harry interrupted her before she could argue her points. “I learned that I have to do things on my own. I may accept help from others, but it really all comes down to me. I am the one Voldemort wants. It is up to me to survive. Dumbledore can’t be there all the time. Last night should be proof enough of that.”

“He is still the Headmaster, Harry. He can do things others can’t. We need to trust him now more than ever.”

“Hermione,” Harry said sadly. “You have always had authority figures to look up to and trust.” Harry smiled at David and Jane. “Your parents are great people and I understand why you trust the Professors too. I have never had someone to believe in like you have. I have always been on my own. Maybe there was a reason I have had to fight for myself since I can remember or maybe it was just my bad luck. Either way, I know I have to do it now to live through this war. I honestly hope you never see things the way I see them. It is a sad way to see the world.”

“Harry,” Hermione said before her confusion and frustration took over. “What has happened to change you like this?”

“Sirius dying showed me what happens when I leave things for other people to handle. I didn’t know things that I should have known. Everything would have been different if Dumbledore had told me what he should have years ago. I could have lived here my entire life. I could have had a happy childhood.”

“Could have had a childhood,” Tonks mumbled loud enough to be heard.

“Hermione,” Harry faltered and looked at the floor. “I am happy here. For the first time I enjoy summer. I could have had this since they died. I didn’t have to go through everything I did at the Dursleys. One man is responsible for that and I can’t trust him to make the best decisions anymore. How could I?”

With tears in her eyes, Hermione looked away from Harry and saw Tonks crying as well. She saw the hurt in Tonks’ eyes and understood that the woman knew things about Harry’s past that he hadn’t told her. Her parents wore lost looks but they seemed to grasp the meaning of the situation. “I know enough that I guess I have to trust your judgment, Harry. Always know that I will be there for you. I always have.”

Harry sighed and smiled at everyone. “I know, ‘Mione, and thank you for that. You have always been the voice of reason trying to stop me from getting into trouble. Been a big failure on the last part, but nobody’s perfect.” Harry laughed at the face Hermione made.

Her parents chuckled at their daughter who always strived to be perfect in everything she did. “I am only one woman and you are Ron can be too much some times. My perfection can’t fix the lack of it in you two all the time. I only do my best.” Hermione smirked at Harry as he bowed accepting her insult.

“Even knowing our failures you still hang out with us. At some point, it is no longer our fault for being defective.” Harry smiled in a childish way as he poked fun at her earning him a smile and a nod of agreement.

“They are such a team,” Tonks said clapping her hands together.

“Yes we are,” Harry commented. “So, what happened yesterday needs to be kept quiet for now. The result is all that matters at this point. You are safe and I will make sure you are safe when you go back. We are ready to go when you are. David, Jane, would you like to get cloaks to wear so you won’t look out of place quite so much? Don’t worry about the cost,” Harry told them as David patted his pockets searching for his wallet.

“You do not need to pay for things we need, Harry,” Jane told him as a mother would. “We are fortunate enough to handle our own expenses quite well.”

“After today,” Harry negotiated, “if you still feel that way, I will accept your money. Now, let’s go.” Harry pulled out the ring and tapped it setting their destination for Diagon Alley.

“I have to know how you can do that,” Hermione stated giving no chance to avoid it. “You must teach me how.”

“All in good time, Hermione, all in good time.” Harry smirked and held out the ring for everyone to grab on to. When five people were touching the ring, they disappeared from Potter Estate and reappeared in Diagon Alley where most people would Apparate.

“Alright,” Harry prompted as he stowed the ring away. “Madam Malkin’s first, then Gringotts.” They hurried to the clothiers with Tonks bringing up the rear. Once inside, Hermione saw the tension in Tonks’ face and hurried her parents along.

Madam Malkin assisted the Grangers in selecting two cloaks made of the finest material in the shop. Harry had insisted that they spare no expense since he was buying. Their protests fell on deaf ears as he busied himself with trying to make Tonks laugh.

Once the robes were fitted and the bill paid with a signature, Harry led them to Gringotts. Only a few people in the Alley had noticed Harry and they let him be since he looked determined to get where he was going. Entering the bank, Harry walked to the nearest station and before he could say anything the goblin signaled the rear door guard.

Harry and his entourage followed the goblin to the doors and they were immediately met by Griphook. “Harry, a pleasure to see you again. The Director wishes to offer his thanks to you for your assistance in the past few weeks. He is in a meeting abroad and that is why he can not give you his thanks personally.”

“He is most welcome, Griphook,” Harry replied. “I need to arrange a few things and I believe Gringotts is the best place to help me. Is there somewhere we can talk privately?”

Griphook waved them forward and led them down a long hallway and into an elegant meeting room. "What can Gringotts do for you today?"

"I need security added to a house for my friends. They were recently attacked by some Death Eaters and the wards were destroyed. I would like the wards repaired and additional ones added. I am willing to pay for what needs done. The home is the Granger's residence. They can give you the exact location. Is what I want possible?"

"Harry," Griphook said with a toothy smile. "Anything is possible as long as one is willing to see it done."

"I am determined to see it done, Griphook. What choices are available? Oh, and they have a business that needs the same protections."

Griphook called in a warding expert and they outlined the possibilities for Harry to choose from. Hermione got into the discussion and wanted to know how everything worked. David and Jane simply watched and listened as different safety wards were described and planned. As the list of selected wards grew, David began to add up the costs and convert the figures into pounds.

When a plan had been decided upon, David nearly fell out of his chair at the total he estimated. "Harry, we can not accept this level of charity. If my numbers are correct, the house is barely worth that much. Do all Wizarding people have wards put on their homes?"

Griphook smiled again and answered the question. "Most have basic ones that they attempt to erect themselves. Some have family or friends do them. We have the finest ward experts in the world at our disposal. We have a comprehensive plan and integration strategy for your home and business. Your residence will be as well protected as many old family homes when we are done. It will take about a week for us to finish the work since we have to bring people in to complete the project and to hide our activities from the muggles. We also have to accommodate existing wards that may or may not be in place."

"Then it is settled," Harry announced without concern. "You will begin tomorrow and I only need to know where to sign."

"That is too much," David said and Hermione mirrored him.

"Will I notice the cost considering my finances, Griphook?" Harry asked.

"I doubt that you would, Harry," Griphook answered. "Mr. Potter is quite wealthy. I suggest you accept his kindness as I have yet to see anyone win an argument with him inside these walls."

"Ha, see," Harry said pointing to Griphook. "Listen to the wonderful goblin. He is a very smart person." Harry looked away quickly to avoid seeing the questioning looks the elder Grangers gave him and the contemptuous one from Hermione. "Griphook, can I take care of something else today?"

"What do you need handled, Harry?" Griphook asked.

Harry pulled Griphook over to the side of the room out of hearing range of everyone else. "I need to have my will drawn up. I am not the safest person in the world and I have things that should go to certain people."

Griphook nodded his head and smiled. "Harry, I will draw up the proper documents immediately. Do you know how you want things divided up?"

"Um," Harry thought tapping his head with his right hand. "How much would be a comfortable amount to live a hundred years on?"

"A comfortable amount," Griphook explained, "would be fifteen thousand galleons a year. Five hundred thousand galleons should be enough to live on if it is invested and not be spent frivolously."

Harry debated the situation for a few moments. "Seven hundred thousand for Arthur and Molly Weasley, two hundred thousand for Fred and George Weasley and the percent of their business they gave me, five hundred thousand for Remus Lupin, and split the rest three ways between Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Nymphadora Tonks." Harry thought about the summer and knew that he wanted Tonks taken care of if something would happen. *'She has*

helped me so much in the last few weeks. Besides, it is not as if I don't have enough to go around.'

"What of your property, Harry?" Griphook asked as he finished noting Harry's requests.

"Oh, yeah," Harry thought. "If they can get onto the property, then they can share it or whatever. I don't know if they could get back onto the property if I died. I got the impression that those who my parents told couldn't find it after they died. Something to do with the wards or rather."

"That would not surprise me, Harry," Griphook offered. "An old family like yours would have protections like that on their home. It was quite popular in the fourteen hundreds."

"Oh," Harry added, "and all the books should go to Hermione and Ron should get my brooms. Tonks can have the vehicles and Hagrid can have the griffins if they will take him. The elves can do whatever they want. I am sure Hermione will take care of them no matter what. I can't think of anything else that needs spelled out."

"Very good, Harry," Griphook said finishing his notes. Business concluded, Harry shook Griphook's hand and thanked him leaving instructions to notify him when the document was finished. After the two rejoined the group, Harry watched Tonks finish her animated story complete with actions and impersonations.

"Tonks, shall we pay a visit to our friendly troublemakers before leaving. I am sure certain people are looking for Hermione and her family after yesterday. I would hate to leave them wondering for too long."

"Excellent idea, Harry," Tonks said with a warm smile stretching across her face that Hermione saw quite clearly. Griphook escorted the group back to the front of the building. Hermione held back and walked with Harry as they followed Griphook.

"You love her, don't you?" Hermione asked with her normal all-knowing tone.

“What do you mean?” Harry questioned while looking at Tonks who was talking with Griphook and the Grangers.

“Exactly what I mean,” Hermione commented with a smirk. “I didn’t say who, but you looked at her right away. I see how you two are. I know you better than most, Harry. You can’t fool me and you know it.”

Harry sighed and ran his hand through his hair. “I don’t know what love feels like, Hermione. I never really felt it so I can’t say.”

“You have felt it,” Hermione told him sternly. “Mrs. Weasley shows you what it feels like. She loves you like her own. Sirius loved you and I know you felt what that was like. That night we saved him from the tower, you knew exactly what it felt like. The more you love someone the more it hurts when that person is taken away. Ginny, me, Ron, and the rest of the Weasleys all love you even if most of them won’t admit it openly. So, back to my question, do you love her?”

“I don’t know, Hermione,” Harry answered. “I just don’t know. I like her and I care about her. I want her safe and happy. I have a lot of fun with her and she makes me feel good about a lot of things. What do you think that means?”

“I am not going to tell you, Harry,” Hermione shook her head. “This is something you have to figure out for yourself. It will mean more when you do.”

Hermione smirked the rest of the way out of Gringotts and down the alley to the Weasley’s store. Harry opened the door and led the way in giving the Grangers a warning not to touch anything for their own safety. The place was busy with kids running around the oddly shaped shelves and displays with their parents chasing after them futilely.

One girl, who was about five years old, came around a display nearly up-ending it and came to a halt in front of Harry. She looked up with her bright smiling face showing the two missing teeth. As she recognized who Harry was, her mouth dropped open and she raised her arm to point at Harry mutely.

Becoming concerned, Harry looked around and asked, "What?" Tonks started laughing as did Hermione and they mimicked the little girl by pointing at Harry with their mouths open. "Nutters, the lot of you."

"You're...Harry...Potter," the girl stammered barely able to speak.

"Last time I checked, yeah," Harry said feeling overly exposed in the active store. "You know me, but I don't know you. What's your name?"

The girl looked around quickly and found her mother running over to her with a wary look on her face. "Krystal, I have told you to stop running off like that. Now, quit bothering these people and stay with me."

"But, mum, it is Harry Potter," Krystal said with the last being whispered in her mother's ear as she was picked up and held.

"Oh, honey, surely it is just someone who looks...like...him," the mother said drifting off as she looked closer at Harry.

"At least now I know your name, Krystal," Harry commented as he smiled at the mother and daughter. "Good morning," Harry offered his hand to Krystal, who accepted it shyly, and to the mother. "Brilliant store to aid in trouble making, wouldn't you agree?" Harry watched Krystal smile brightly as her surprise faded, but the mother still seemed shocked at meeting Harry.

"Mr. Potter," the woman said properly. "I would like to thank you for everything you have done. It means a lot to those of us who didn't agree with the Ministry when Fudge was in charge. It means even more to those who suffered the first time around. I lost much of my family to You-Know-Who."

"Voldemort," Harry said causing the woman to stifle a shriek. "Is nothing but a murderer. Do not fear his name. It only gives him more power over you if you do. He is a man like anyone else only he kills for fun." Harry relaxed his face when he saw the little girl looking scared. "Dragons are scarier than Voldemort, Krystal. I really know they are."

Krystal's fear seemed to fade as she looked at Harry. "That's 'cus you have seen both, right?"

"Yup, and dragons are way more scary." Harry laughed with the little girl as she believed him. "Have a good day, Krystal."

Harry walked deeper into the store leaving a shocked mother and a happy kid behind. Tonks followed Harry closely as did the Grangers, but Hermione stayed behind.

"Make your own choices about what you are going to be afraid of, Krystal," Hermione told her. "That is what Harry has done his entire life. Enjoy your summer." Hermione hurried to catch up to Harry leaving the mother to wander out of the store both confused and thoughtful.

Harry moved through the people catching sight of a few he knew by face from school. They waved and watched him as he searched for the twins. When Harry found Fred emerging from the rear storeroom carrying a box of Canary Crèmes, he waved only to be greeted in a much different way.

"Harry!" Fred yelled drawing the attention of many of the patrons. Fred ignored the people staring at him and Harry and searched out for the people he had been told to look for. He saw Tonks with her wand out scanning the crowd, two adults who looked familiar, and finally Hermione pushing her way through some customers. "Thank Merlin."

George hurried out of the backroom and saw the group everyone was looking at. "Harry, Hermione, and you others," he said waving at them. "Join us in the back for a moment."

Fred took up damage control and made an announcement. "Yes, it is The Harry Potter. Now, we have business to discuss with him. Maybe a few more Ministries to topple or another Dark Lord to insult. Please continue with your buying ways and maybe he will give a kiss to the female who buys the most stuff."

Harry's scowl was interrupted when Tonks pushed him forward and into George who yanked him behind the curtain and motioned for the

others to follow. Once the group had reassembled in the rather empty office the twins shared, Harry voiced his question. "What in the bloody hell was that all about?"

Fred answered the question. "He puts the Ministry on its head and he asks what is going on. Harry, you might be a hero, but you sure are thick. I have a better question, what happened last night?" Fred looked at Hermione when he asked the question.

"We were at home when someone told us to leave," Hermione explained. "We got what we could and left. We were taken somewhere, and then Harry came to get us. I can't tell you who helped us or where we were taken, but I can tell you that we are safe and staying with Harry now." Her ending tone stopped the twins from pressing her further. "Is the house alright?"

Fred sighed before answering. "Bill said the house looks a little rough, but they are fixing that today. They should be done with the repairs soon and then start on the wards. Dumbledore has been looking for all of you. 'People' are worried."

"Good for them," Harry said with a smirk. "Everyone is fine and we are all perfectly safe. Tell Dumbledore to hurry up with his wards. I have Gringotts scheduled to begin work as soon as they have the people ready."

"What do you mean," George asked.

"Gringotts is putting up wards on the Granger's house and business," Harry said. "I don't want Dumbledore messing about while the goblins are securing the home. This has nothing to do with him so he should stay out of it."

The twins watched as they saw the same Harry who came to the Order meetings telling them what to do. "I will relay the message, Harry," Fred offered. "It is good to see you again, and we are all happy to see our favorite bookworm safe and sound."

Hermione stared at Fred until George made his comment. "Yes, Ron will be most happy to know you are still in one piece." The twins reveled in watching Hermione close her eyes and fight down

whatever emotion she was battling. "And you must be Hermione's parents; pleasure to meet you."

Fred shook their hands after George and inclined his head towards Hermione. "Want to have fun with your perfect daughter, mention our git of a brother, Ron. She is most expressive when you do."

Hermione grabbed a wand off the lone worktable in the room and threw it at George. It hit him in the forehead and green boils popped into existence and gave off a nasty hissing sound accompanied by a rather disgusting odor.

"Fred, we need to add another warning on this new version of the wand," George said through gritted teeth. "It burns if it is thrown at someone. Could you counter it, please?"

Fred noted the warning in a notebook he pulled from his pocket. "In a moment, brother. We will let others know that you are in good health, Hermione. We will also forward your suggestion to Dumbledore, Harry."

"Thank you," Harry said as Hermione whispered something in Fred's ear.

"Also," Fred added, "you are invited to the Burrow on Sunday for lunch. Please bring whoever you would like to. It is a family dinner that mum wanted to have last week. She threatened everyone to invite you next time we see you or she wouldn't feed us for a month."

Harry watched as Fred imitated his mother. "She never mentioned it to me?"

"A bit dodgy, her mind is," Fred explained shaking his head. "I think Ginny has finally broken her shaky grasp on reality."

"More likely," Harry commented, "that you guys went too far and she snapped."

"That hurts, Harry," George said after reversing the boils on his head. "You think so little of us by saying that. We always thought you were

on our side, an ally in the fight against rules, but now we see where your loyalties lie.”

“Sad, very sad,” Fred shook his head dismally. “So young too. Oh well, we have a shop full of people to corrupt so we best get back to it.”

Fred left the room for the shop area as George motioned to the rear of the store. “We have a door in the back in case the authorities come for us.”

When everyone moved towards the door, Harry asked for some Extendable Ears. He received a small box full of them without a hesitation from George. Once in the rear alley, Harry held out the portkey and took the group back to Potter Estate.

Saturday was spent with Harry teaching Hermione how to cast the other shields. She couldn’t master the Imprimis or Patrocinor shields, but she became more consistent with the Fortis Aegis. She also had the beginnings of a solid Absolvo shield much to Harry’s happiness. He showed her how to do the Bone Shattering and Breaking spells, and Harry told her how he thought about magic and casting it.

Hermione spent most of the evening assimilating Harry’s views of magic with her own in an attempt to improve her abilities. She stated her summer goal was to perform one wandless spell before returning to Hogwarts.

Night fell with Hermione mumbling in her sleep about magic and will power. The Grangers slept soundly with the thought of being safe at home in the near future. Harry and Tonks drifted off after touching and kissing each other long into the night.

Sunday dawned bright before the clouds moved in around nine ending the sunny day and leaving it overcast. Harry, again, worked with Hermione trying to teach her how to perform the spells she was working on and channeling her magic into them. They discovered that anger wasn’t a good focus for her magic. Her spells became unpredictable and didn’t work right when she used anger to cast them.

After two hours of trying different things, they found that she got the best results when she focused on her care for others. Harry jokingly dubbed it her “Saving People” thing or her “S.P.E.W.” focus. To his surprise, Hermione accepted his opinion about it and worked even harder at using it to improve her magic.

Hermione accepted the fact that she couldn’t compete with Harry’s raw power or intent within a few demonstrations of the spells. She knew that knowledge and precision would be her strengths, and she should focus on those as much as she could. As the afternoon approached, Harry watched Hermione successfully cast the Absolvo shield for the first time. It held up against two of Harry’s Stunners before collapsing under the third.

“Great job, Hermione,” Harry congratulated her and gave her a quick hug.

Her parents and Tonks did the same and she beamed with pride. When they left the training room, Hermione moved close to Harry.

“Thanks for holding back, Harry,” Hermione said. “I know it helps get my confidence up so I will do better. You are a great teacher.”

“What ever do you mean?” Harry asked acting as if he didn’t know what she was saying.

“Please, Harry,” Hermione chided him. “I have felt the amount of magic you can put into a spell. I was there Thursday night when you attacked those first three. We all felt it. Besides, you did the same thing in the D.A. when you were helping the younger students or those who weren’t very good. I know how you think, Harry. You can’t pull one over on me.”

Harry only smirked in response. “I know how you think too, Hermione. You can’t pull one over on me either.”

Much to the elves disappointment, Harry told them that they were going away for lunch and maybe dinner as well. Harry tapped the ring and created a portkey to the Burrow and held it out for everyone to grab onto. Yet again everyone was transported, as one, to their destination.

They appeared in the backyard of the Burrow to find it patiently waiting for them in the silence of the country. Harry looked around while the group still circled the ring but wasn't touching it. He tapped the ring creating a return trip, before they needed it, and tucked it away in his cloak. "Shall we see if anyone is home?"

Harry led the way to the house with Hermione next to him, the Grangers behind them, and Tonks bringing up the rear as usual. Harry knocked on the back door and waited. He heard nothing inside until the door swung open to reveal Molly smiling at him.

"Harry," she said louder than necessary and wrapped him in a fierce hug which he returned. Harry took as deep a breath as he could taking in the smell of the Burrow and the cooking meal. "Hermione!" Harry moved back and watched as Hermione got the same treatment but it lasted a little longer as he saw Molly sigh a few times before releasing her. The Grangers were greeted pleasantly before Tonks was met with a firm look.

"Tonks," Molly said. "Everything alright then?"

"Everything is smashing, Molly," Tonks replied brightly giving her a smirk and nodded in Harry's direction.

"Everything is fine, Molly," Harry said patting the small of Tonks' back. "I am great, actually."

"If you are sure, Harry, dear?" Molly asked before motioning them inside. "We were so happy to hear that you were safe after such a frightening experience, Hermione. Who warned you?"

"Someone, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione answered giving away nothing. "Let us leave it at that, please. It all worked out in the end."

"Quite," Molly relented regrettably. "Well, lunch isn't ready yet so let's move into the living room until then."

When they entered the living room, Harry jumped as many people shouted "Surprise" and "Happy Birthday" to him. The Weasley's minus Percy, Remus, Luna and Odd, Hagrid, Minerva, and Dumbledore were arranged around the room in various ways. As he

came to understand the situation, Harry slid his partially exposed wand back into its holster.

"What is this?" Harry asked.

"Can't pull one over on you, huh?" Hermione sung in his ear before moving off to join the others.

"This is for me?" Harry asked not sure how to handle the attention.

"Who else's birthday is it today?" Ron asked.

"Neville's," Harry answered quickly buying himself more time to figure out what was going on.

"Yeah, well," Ron replied waving his hand. "You are here and Neville isn't. So happy birthday all the same, Harry."

Everyone moved around offering Harry their well wishes and handing him presents in varying sizes. Hagrid's moved on its own giving Harry pause before asking if it would hurt anyone.

"Nah, it ain't gonna hurt no one," Hagrid explained. "It's a book you need this 'ear. We movin' on ter more interestin' creatures. It's your NEWT 'ear an all you know."

"Thanks, Hagrid," Harry said moving the book away from the rest of the presents out of fear it would eat them or something similar. Ginny gave Harry a kiss on the cheek when she handed him her present. The uproar from the Weasley brothers gave her a chance to ask him how Tonks was.

"Brilliant," Harry returned with a wide smile. As he was jumped on by the twins and Ron, Dumbledore pulled Tonks to the side and away from the bulk of the noise. Harry fought his way out of the Weasley pile in time to join the pair before Tonks had answered. "Something you wanted to ask me, Professor?"

"I merely wanted to know how the Grangers came into your company, Harry," Albus asked.

“Then,” Harry prompted moving in front of Tonks, “Ask me.” Albus inclined his ghostly white eyebrows inferring the question. “I was alerted to what happened at their home and I met them where they were moved to. They joined me at home that very night. I will not explain it further.”

Albus slowly nodded his head once accepting the answer before asking another question. “Harry, we were at the Grangers repairing the damage and putting up wards yesterday evening when a rather determined group of people and goblins showed up. I won’t bore you with the details but sufficed to say we were told to leave. Did you have anything to do with that?”

Harry smiled and put on a look of confused thought moving his head side-to-side for a few moments. “I might remember something. Oh, yeah, I hired them to secure the residence. I will not have my friends in any greater risk than they already are. I was told that it would take a week or so to complete the work.”

Albus couldn’t help but show his surprise. “A week for wards on a home. My dear boy, what wards are they putting on the house?”

“I left off the Muggle-Repelling and Obscuring wards, but I think I selected the rest that were offered,” Harry watched as the room reacted to his statements. Bill and Albus were the most reactive.

“Is that why I was notified yesterday that my security improvement work at Gringotts was being delayed?” Bill asked. “My whole team was told to be at work at seven tomorrow evening for night work. We are going to be at the Grangers?”

“It would be my guess,” Harry offered. “Do a good job. Three lives depend on it.” Harry looked at Albus before turning back to Remus and Minerva whose presents hung limply in their hands.

“Harry,” Albus interjected. “Perhaps we can speak later tonight about some things I need your assistance with.”

Without looking back, Harry answered. “Maybe, if there is time.”

Remus hugged Harry and slipped the present into his hand. "Open it when you are alone, Harry. Do not let Molly see it."

"Okay," Harry whispered back. "If you want, you can come back with us tonight. You said you wanted to talk about something."

"If you will have me, I would love to," Remus accepted.

"Harry," Minerva held out his present. It was a finely wrapped item in the shape of a book. "Not to discourage your hopes at something else, but I think you should give this some serious thought." Minerva moved to the side and gave Tonks a penetrating stare.

"Minerva," Tonks said brightly, "been planning on enjoying yourself today?"

"Yes, I have, Tonks," Minerva answered sliding her eyes to Harry for a second.

"I believe Molly could help you with that," Tonks hinted before moving back to Harry and his friends as they settled on the couch and began talking about many things.

Molly saw the interaction and pulled Minerva into the kitchen for a chat. Jane followed the women for the simple fact that she knew they had insight into what was going on in their world that Hermione and Harry might not. Arthur accosted David as soon as it was possible and led him into the back shed for explanations about muggle things and how they worked.

Harry and his friends talked about anything that came up. The twins grilled him on who his girlfriend was and pressed Tonks and Ginny for the information. They tried to get Hermione to tell them, but she quickly ended their hopes at learning anything from her with threats of repeating things Angelina, Alicia, and Katie might have told her.

Luna and Odd left before lunch saying that they had plans to search for some unknown creature in the highlands later that day and needed to get ready. Hagrid wished Harry a good birthday and left, via a portkey Dumbledore had created, to feed his variety of animals.

Molly announced lunch and they found a table loaded with food waiting for them. Harry was placed at the head as the honoured guest and his friends filled in around him. The meal was very filling and left Harry feeling way too full to do much more than settle back into his place on the couch.

When the food had been digested enough to allow movement, Ron suggested a game of Quidditch. Having planned on it, Harry pulled out his shrunken broom and remembered just in time to let Tonks enlarge it back to normal. The younger players decided to take on the older ones splitting up the twins as Remus joined the older side. With the game in full swing, Harry flew against Charlie for the snitch.

Due to his recent increase in mass, Harry was able to try different moves that he never could before. When Charlie saw the snitch and went after it, Harry would block him or physically fly him off course. Charlie was instructing Harry how to use his body from the Seeker position as the game progressed. Ginny scored enough goals against Bill to keep her team in the game as Remus and Fred attacked Ron with joy.

It was nearing dinner time when Harry had enough teaching and went after the snitch wearing a serious look on his face that surprised even Charlie. They both saw the golden ball flitting on the far side of the pitch and flew after it. Charlie knew he couldn't out fly Harry on a Firebolt so he used every non-lethal trick he knew to keep even with Harry. As the battle soared across the pitch, everyone watched eagerly.

Charlie would grab Harry's arm and he would fight it off. Charlie would kick at his broom and Harry would fly through it. As they came even with the slightly battered snitch, Charlie reached for it as it turned in his favour. Harry knew he was out of position and had little choice but to fight it out. He brought his left elbow down on the inside of Charlie's right arm and tucked it in holding Charlie away from the snitch.

Removing Charlie's advantage of positioning, Harry reached out with his right hand and fought against Charlie's left. The tug-of-war continued until Harry leaned as far forward as he could and grasped

the golden ball tightly in his hand. Charlie's free hand came around Harry's a second later. Ending the game, Harry untangled his left arm and pumped his right in the air showing off the snitch.

Cheers went up and the teams landed nursing their wounds from the hard-fought game. "You cheated, Harry," Hermione scolded him.

"No, he didn't, Hermione," Charlie corrected. "He won. It is only cheating if you get caught and I would have done the same thing. It is fair if both players play the same way. Any professional game would have been worse than that." Harry smiled and accepted the victory. Charlie took a lot of ribbing at the hands of his brothers for losing to someone years younger than him.

"Harry is just a better player than I am," Charlie admitted after letting his siblings get their shots at him. "He will make a challenging threat this year and next at Hogwarts. If he can use his size and speed to their fullest, he should make a pro team after he graduates."

"There you go, Harry," Ron yelled, "a pro team. Maybe you could get on the Cannons and give them a winning season."

"Or he could take any other team to the Quidditch Cup and win it," The twins chimed in unison.

"I would be lucky to make the tryouts," Harry said getting a reproachful stare from Hermione, Ginny, Tonks, and the males Weasleys.

Minerva cleared her throat. "You had better do better than that, Mr. Potter. I expect more from my Gryffindors." She moved back to the house with Jane and Molly at her sides.

Dinner was served and consumed in standard Weasley-fashion. As the meal ended, Dumbledore held Harry back and asked him about what happened at the Grangers and with the goblins.

"You couldn't keep me safe let alone my friends," Harry fumed. "You bet your arse I asked the goblins for help. Their whole job is based on keeping things safe. If I have to have them ward all of my friends'

homes, then so be it. I have the money to do so and keeping them safe is more important than some gold."

"I do not disagree, Harry," Albus spoke quietly. "But bringing in people we do not know if we can trust is not the best option. We could have managed the same level of protections."

"Yeah," Harry snapped. "In how many months? You had all year to arrange for her safety and you did what? A couple wards or something. I want the whole thing done soon. Gringotts can do that and I trust Ragnok and Griphook to get it done. They have yet to fail me, which is something I can't say about you."

"I know I have failed you, Harry," Albus conceded. "I was hoping I could prove myself to you. We need to work together to beat Voldemort. This animosity between us only helps him toward victory."

"Your idleness has helped him to victory," Harry challenged. "Not my desire to protect me and those I care about. You want to prove yourself to me, start reducing the number of Death Eaters out there. Show them that Voldemort leads them to prison or worse. You can't have a clean war and your hope of it should have died the first time around. I can't, I won't let another child become like me just to chase some pipe dream you have."

"Do you suggest we kill his followers, Harry?"

"I suggest we fight fire with fire, Albus." Harry stared down his headmaster. "Only because I got Fudge out is the Ministry doing anything positive in this war. Why is that? Why must I be the one to do this?"

Albus sighed, removed his glasses, and rubbed his eyes. "Harry, I am an old man. I won't be here forever, quite the contrary. You have so many abilities that you haven't even begun to tap into. You need all of your faculties to win this war and I have tried to help you develop them."

"Has all this been just one long lesson?" Harry demanded loud enough that the noise in the living room died away instantly.

“At times,” Albus said holding his head high, “I have left clues for you and your friends to find and follow. It was the end of your first year when you did something I didn’t plan on. Your second year was more of the same with you getting too involved. Third year was one thing after another. Forth year was out of my hands for the most part and last year was one bad decision after another. In short, I am here with my hat in my hands asking for you to work with me.”

“Why should I?” Harry asked.

“You can make things happen just like I can,” Albus offered. “Together, we can make them happen with little effort or chance for failure. Fudge, Amelia, Gringotts, and the Grangers are things you have done with little or no help from me. We might be able to really disrupt Voldemort’s plans if we work together.”

“If you remove his financial support and those willing to follow him you can disrupt his plans.” Harry glared at Albus only with less intensity than before. “If you want my help, then start working at ending his chances for success. We both know Azkaban has to be on his list as are the Weasleys and my other friends. Once Griphook is done with Hermione’s house, they are coming here if the Weasleys will let them.”

“We have strengthened the wards here for a long time, Harry,” Albus said with all honesty. “It is a known fact that the Weasleys support you and you visit them. This was the biggest target aside from you and Hogwarts that we could determine. I am confident that they are safe here as are the Weasleys.”

“I am sure Bill spent a lot of time on the wards here,” Harry spoke in a slightly questioning way.

“I believe he did, Harry,” Albus confirmed. “I spent many hours here as well. The fact that you are here should be proof enough that we are content with your safety.”

Harry waved off Dumbledore’s suggestion. “I am safe because I think I am safe. Safety is an illusion if you are living in fear, Albus. I do not live in fear therefore I am safe.” Harry sighed and felt tired. “Enough

of this discussion. I am going back to my friends and enjoy their company.”

“Before you go, Harry,” Albus stalled. “How did the Grangers end up in your care?”

“I was notified that they had been attacked and were being protected somewhere,” Harry stated. He saw Albus show he wanted more of an answer, but he resisted.

“Harry, there were people at their house that normally do not involve themselves in things like this. Could you explain that?” Albus asked.

“I have friends and allies outside of Hogwarts, Professor,” Harry said with a knowing smirk. He left the room leaving a contemplative man to his musings and found the occupants of the living room speaking in hushed tones. Soon the conversation picked up and the joyous mood returned. Albus left shortly after his conversation with Harry. Minerva followed half an hour later citing the time.

As the night grew late, Harry looked at the clock in the room. Most of the arms pointed to “Home.” Percy’s was pointing at “Lost” leaving an empty feeling in Harry. He settled into a more observant role and watched everyone talking and playing around. The twins never let up in their quest to have fun. Anyone could be a victim at any time although Molly was always the safest person in the room.

Tonks checked the time and sighed while giving Harry a look. “It is getting late and we should get back.”

Harry nodded and found Remus looking at him hopefully. Harry smiled and waved him over. “I guess we should be going then. Thank you, all, for such a great day. It is the first birthday party I can remember having.” Harry saw the saddened looks on everyone’s faces. “I will never forget today.”

“You going to stop by soon, mate,” Ron asked.

“Sure,” Harry offered before adding, “or you could come to me. Maybe we will try that next time.”

Hugs all around led to Harry, Tonks, the Grangers, and Remus walking into the field behind the Burrow. Once they were away from the house, Harry gestured to Tonks. She waved her wand over everyone and found a Tracking charm on Hermione and Jane.

“Determined old codger, isn’t he?” Tonks quipped as she countered the charms. “Much better, Harry.”

“Wonderful,” Harry commented. “Remus, can I trust you?”

“What?” Remus asked shocked that Harry would question his loyalty. “Of course you can trust me.”

“Nothing you see, hear, and learn can be told to another person without my express permission. Do you understand?”

“Of course, but I am not sure what I will see, hear, or learn that would cause you to act like this.”

Harry pulled out his wand and moved it over Remus giving him the location of his home. Remus held his tongue before commenting on Harry’s use of magic. As the information flooded into his mind, Remus’s eyes widened. “Well, now I know some of what I wanted to tell you. Every time I was near you I felt something itching to get out, but I couldn’t for the life of me figure out what it was. Now, I know or rather remember again.”

Harry smiled at Remus and pulled out the portkey. He smirked and tapped it causing it to glow blue for a second. Remus’s shocked look was what Harry was waiting for. “That is nothing, Remus. Grab on, next stop Potter Estate.”

The group of six touched the ring and were whisked away in the blink of an eye.

My thanks to fanficlover38 for answering a question I had about something dealt with in this chapter. He allowed this to be written faster than it would have been otherwise.

15. Missions

With the whirling sound of rushing air in his ears, Harry watched them appear in the foyer his home. He looked around and smiled at Remus whose mouth was gaping. "Fun breaking a few rules isn't it, Moony?"

Remus looked around in amazement with a hint of reminiscing. He slowly shuffled his feet over to the stair case and ran his hand around the carved bust of a griffin at the start of the railing. With a muffled voice, Remus spoke haltingly. "We broke this one day during the summer before our seventh year. Sirius split it in half with a sword from upstairs while he and James were messing around. Paul never forgave Sirius for that."

Harry listened intently as Remus shared the story. "Paul is still here, Remus. Would you like to talk to him now?"

"No, Harry," Remus said. "I can talk to him tomorrow. I'm not really sure he would welcome seeing me again. I never did any damage, but I was usually around when it happened. Been yelled at more times than I can remember by that elf. I miss those days, and my friends. Well, enough wallowing on your birthday."

"My birthday was yesterday, Remus," Harry corrected and waved off Remus's concern. Once everyone was settled in the living room, Harry emptied his pockets onto the couch pulling out every present he had been given and piling them up. Hagrid's was kept separate out of fear for the others. With child-like glee, Harry started ripping the wrappings off the items finding sweets and Chocolate Frog cards in a few packages and some Weasley products in others. True to his word, Hagrid's present was a book about deadly beasts and creatures that Harry hoped wouldn't be part of a practical learning experience.

"He's not going to have us working with those things," Hermione asked hesitantly, "is he?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Harry replied setting the restless book near the fireplace under a heavy log. "Might not hold it, but it's the best I got for now."

Harry worked on opening Ginny's present which ended up being a two part gift. One part consisted of a handmade card that didn't sing while the other part was a racy booklet on "*Things To Try In The Bedroom.*" As Harry turned bright red and hid the booklet away quickly, Tonks tackled him trying to find out what the gift was.

A quick wrestling match ensued as the audience looked on in interest. When Tonks pinned Harry's shoulders to the ground, she saw the booklet peaking out of his pocket and snatched it away.

"Good thing Molly didn't see this," Tonks said whistling softly. "Some good ideas in here."

"What is it, Tonks?" Hermione asked trying to catch sight of the title. Tonks held it out for all to see as Harry closed his eyes in embarrassment.

"Is she making you an offer, Harry?" Remus asked smirking cautiously.

"I hope not," Tonks stated decisively before planting a firm kiss on Harry's lips. He responded immediately bringing his hands to rest on her hips and pulling her to him eagerly.

Hermione giggled, but Remus gave a confirming sigh. "That explains a lot."

After the kiss ended, Harry processed what had been said. "Explains what?"

Remus smiled knowingly. "The werewolf in me can smell things other people normally can't. The last few weeks you have smelled strongly of Tonks, but I figured it was because you two lived in tight confines. I see that my initial thoughts were correct and my reasonings were not." Remus's smile turned into something more often seen on one of the twins faces. "Older women, Harry? I never would have figured you were into that sort of thing."

"You make me sound ancient, Remus," Tonks pouted. "I am young enough to wear him out," she said pointing at Harry who was lying on the floor beneath her.

Remus's smirk deepened even more as he looked to a shocked Harry. In a quick shifting of his weight, Harry pulled Tonks down and to the side freeing him from her dominance. "We will finish this later, Harry," Tonks threatened as she untangled her legs from her cloak.

Trying to save face, Harry looked at Tonks and raised his eyebrows. "I look forward to it, Nymphadora."

Remus was surprised to see her smile back and nod. "I am glad you found someone who can make you enjoy life, Harry. That is such an important accomplishment."

Harry smiled a truly honest smile before continuing with his remaining presents. Harry came to Minerva's present and folded the paper back. The confusion on his face had Tonks leaning in to look at the title of the book. "Why would she give me, *Professional Quidditch Techniques To Make The Team?*"

Tonks joined Harry on the couch and wrapped her arm around him. "She is trying to tell you that you might have a future in professional Quidditch and should keep it in mind as you plan for a career after Hogwarts." Harry started to object and she could tell what his reason was going to be. "You hush about that. It will all be taken care of by then. If for some reason it isn't, do not worry about it. You have to live your life your way or what is the point?"

Harry wanted to argue that his life wasn't that easy, but the looks of agreement from Remus and Hermione told him he wouldn't win the fight. Giving the book a chance, he flipped through it quickly looking at the chapter titles. "This has common moves and basic game plans as well as tips on getting scouted. There is even a section on tryouts and what they are looking for." Harry's attention disappeared into the book as everyone looked on.

Tonks slowly reached up with her right hand and pulled the book from Harry's grasp and carefully set it on the empty spot of cushion next to her. "It will be still here when you are done opening the last present, Harry. People are waiting you know."

Harry smirked and grabbed the last present, which was from Remus, and mumbled, "Yeah, impatiently at that." Harry was thanked for his comment by a playful smack to the back of his head.

Wrapping removed, Harry held in his hands a bottle of Ogden's Finest. He looked at Remus questioning the present. "I didn't know you were out of the Dursley's when I got that. It is kind of a mute point now that you are living here though." Remus waved his hand in the direction of the cellar. "You have more than enough alcohol in this house to keep Hagrid in a stupor for decades. It was just something your father and us did on his sixteenth birthday." Remus laughed longingly as he remembered the events.

"Sirius may have wanted to seem like the perfect rogue, but he had problems handling his liquor that night. Come to think of it, the next day as well." Remus kept laughing as he replayed the images in his head. "He never forgave me for beating him in that drinking game. He was always a sore loser unless it was your father he lost to."

"Thank you, Remus," Harry said seriously. "It means a lot to me." Harry set the bottle to the side carefully and relaxed into the couch and Tonks. "You said something about remembering when you got here. What do you mean?"

Remus contemplated what to say to Harry before making his decision. "When your father died, Harry, I forgot about this place. Everything just disappeared from my mind. I knew right then that something had happened to them, because they were never apart during those days. No one was alone then. When I first saw you in your third year, I felt something stir in my memories. It wasn't much, but it was there. Every time I saw you, it happened again.

"Sirius experienced the same thing when he saw you. We talked about it, but we were never able to figure out what it was. I take it that you found out about this place recently." At Harry's nod, Remus smiled. "The feelings became stronger when I saw you, but the information was still blocked. The second you gave me access to here, everything came flooding back. Memories of this house and things that happened here suddenly appeared. Oh, the memories were amazing to have back."

"I am not sure what you mean," a confused Harry said.

"The spells that protect this house, your house," Remus tried to explain. "Are so very powerful and ancient that they must not only block the location of the house but memories of it as well. You feel that something is missing, but you have no idea where to start in trying to figure out what is missing."

Tonks hugged Harry tightly and whispered that it was late and they had work the next day. Harry stood and offered Remus a hug which was accepted gratefully. "Harry, you look tired and we have a lot of time to share stories. I will see you tomorrow."

"You will," Harry confirmed and looked to Tonks. "It might not be until night, but I will be here."

"Harry?" Hermione asked looking to Tonks. "Why won't you be here in the morning?"

"I..." Harry debated what to say. "I do things during the weekdays. Please, do not ask me what I am doing. I can't tell you."

Tonks gave Hermione a firm look stopping her from pressing for more answers. The group broke up and found their beds. Remus took one of the guest rooms further down the hall from the Grangers. With their door closed and charms in place, Tonks rubbed against Harry's front slowly removing his clothes.

"Here is your birthday present, Harry Potter," Tonks said playfully stepping back from Harry. With a wave of her wand, a bow appeared around her neck. "Care to unwrap your present?"

Hormones controlling his movements, Harry pulled at the bow and it released. The ribbon streamed to the floor in fluid slow-motion. He reached up and kissed her fervently while tugging at her cloak. As it slipped from her shoulders, Harry's hands fumbled with her pants. An eager tug removed the button and they fell to the floor in a pile revealing the nightie he had seen weeks earlier.

"I am all yours, Harry," Tonks cooed. "All yours to do as you wish." Harry swallowed and reached to her with trembling hands which stilled as they met skin.

Minutes later, Harry and Tonks fell on the bed with their bodies wrapped around themselves. The nightie lay on the floor where it had been thrown. Blankets were tossed aside with no concern as to where they landed. Moans and grunts sounded in the room as Harry tried to show Tonks how much he enjoyed being with her.

The morning arrived too early leaving Harry and Tonks with a quick breakfast and many unanswered questions to their guests. Hermione asked many of them, but spent most of her time watching Harry move about the house with a determination she had rarely seen in him. His eyes sparkled like they did before the trio did something profoundly stupid but justified at Hogwarts.

With a smirk to Hermione and Remus and a wave to David and Jane, Harry grabbed Tonks hand and Apparated away from Potter Estate and appeared in the team room. They entered the training room to find Cal listening to a heated discussion between Horace, Team Two, and a team Harry couldn't place.

"For the love of Merlin, Jones," Horace snapped viciously. "I think that if Thor agrees with me then you would as well. You have never been one to toss about your opinions on administrative matters before."

"This has nothing to do with me, Horace!" A cloaked man yelled. "Hasn't even been here a month yet and he is leading a team and going on a mission that has this level of importance."

"Exactly," Horace pointed out. "A mission which I am in charge of assigning not you. If you have such a problem with the arrangements, then I suggest you ask Ceps about it. I know you wanted to lead a team of your own, but you, Michael, and Taruse make a great team. You are effective and get the job done quite well. It would be foolish of me to break up a functioning team just to end up rebuilding two of them. I understand being subordinate to Michael is hard since he is so good at his job, but you have to see it from my view point."

“This is bull shit, Horace!” Jones continued yelling. “I wanted that spot. I think I deserved a chance to prove myself.”

“Maybe so,” Horace growled menacingly. “But I make the decisions here and I made them. Ceps is fitting in well and you would be hard pressed to defeat him if he was in the right frame of mind. Now, this conversation is over. Do not bring it up again. Team Five, you have your orders for the day. Stay safe and accomplish your mission.”

Three people turned and started walking towards the door. Harry had seen Michael before during one of his tests, and Jones was easily identifiable with his shorter stature and square-ish shape. Harry felt tension coming from Tonks and readied himself in case anything happened. As the team approached, Jones broke from the ranks and made a direct path for Harry.

Not sure how to handle the situation, Harry reacted as though it was hostile. He drew his wand discretely and waited, poised, for an attack. Jones drew even with Harry and stared him down or rather up a handful of inches.

“Think you are hot shit, Praeceptus?” Jones threatened as his left hand drifted into his cloak. “Watch yourself and don’t get my future team killed off when you fuck up. You got me?”

Harry thought fast on a response. He knew it had to be firm, but non-challenging or Jones would never leave him alone. Images of Draco’s offer and rejection spun in his head as Harry formulated his answer. “I am here to do my best and right now Horace thinks I can lead my team. I am sure that would change if I can’t do the job properly. Just do your bit and stay out of my way and things will be fine.”

Harry watched Jones intently for any aggressive moves that would signal an attack. He saw Jones change his stance a little but nothing looked imminent. As Harry watched, Michael called Jones to him so they could leave. With a grunt, Jones turned slightly so he could walk past Harry and rejoin his group. When the angered man passed Harry, he gave him a punch to the stomach that doubled Harry over.

Harry felt the air leave his lungs quickly and started seeing white and black spots cloud his vision. More as reflex than a conscious thought,

Harry launched a Repelling spell at Jones. Harry kept his footing as he heard a man land roughly a distance away as the clatter of a wooden object sounded on the floor or wall. Harry forced a deep breath into his lungs, ignoring the painful burning, followed by another.

As his sight returned, he saw Jones hurrying to his wand at least ten feet away. Harry Summoned the wand to him and leveled his at the furious man. With falsely assured steps, Harry advanced on Jones. When his wand had disappeared from the floor and flew through the air, Jones followed it. To his frustration and a fair amount of fear, he saw it land in Harry's outstretched hand opposite his aimed wand.

"Fuck me," Jones mumbled through clinched teeth.

"Not my type, arse," Harry said as steadily as he could still fighting against his pained lungs. "They saw something in me that told them I can do this. It is not your decision so back off!"

Harry saw the reaction of the others in the room and most importantly the other two members of Team Five. No one had drawn a wand or did anything but watch the confrontation. Figuring that the current threat had passed, Harry dropped the captured wand on the floor and retreated slowly backwards to join Horace. Cal and Chamel followed his lead and soon joined them.

"Your mission is waiting, Team Five," Horace barked. "Get going and let us not have this sort of thing happen again. We do not have the time for this shite." Horace turned to Harry and pointed him and his team over to the classroom area leaving little question as to where and how fast he wanted them to get over there.

Harry was the last to make it to the destination since he kept one eye on Jones the whole time. Jones had retrieved his wand quickly, but left the room slowly and with a lot of muttering to his team members. Michael gave a slight, begrudging, shake of his head as he left the room and closed the door.

"Now that you have had your fun," Horace said. "We can begin the briefing for your mission today. This came from information that was "pulled" from our recent guests. We have a location of a possible meeting point or safe house. The intel may be old and outdated, but it

is more than we had before. I am not going to sugar coat this, but obviously this isn't the most reliable intel we have. The more seasoned teams have those missions, but I expect you to take this one seriously and accomplish it if it turns out to be viable."

Horace looked over the team before him. His harsh scowl shifted into a nasty smirk that any goblin would be proud of. "You are to go to this address and watch the second address." Horace handed Harry a slip of paper, which was looked at and passed to Tonks and Cal in turn, and a ring that had to be a portkey. "The ring is a portkey to our holding cells just in case. Monitor any and all people coming and going. If you see someone we should bring in, do it quickly and quietly. If things get fucked, unfuck them. If the tossers resist, kill them. We do not expect any big names to frequent this place since the info came from a low level guy, but you never know. This is your first real test, Ceps, do it right and you will get another chance. Mess it up, and you might only get your memory wiped. Go!"

Harry turned and led his team to their room. Hateful thoughts rolled in his head as he walked determinedly to the team room. Once they were reassembled, Harry focused on the task at hand. "I noticed that the place is in Knockturn Alley. How can we get in there unnoticed? Even if we become invisible that is a small alley and there are people moving about all the time."

"That is easy, Ceps," Tonks said waving her hand around. "Since Bones became Minister, there have been daily walk-throughs of the alley by aurors. She always wanted to let the seedier side know that we were aware of their activities, but Fudge always refused the requests. We just need to tag-along on the next patrol. The alley is as clear as it gets when word spreads the aurors are coming. We can pick out a good place to watch and then we wait for anyone to show up."

"On missions like this," Cal offered. "I usually find a long distance vantage point and watch for opposition or possible targets. Remember, I am good at ranged attacks not one-on-one like you two. I can Disillusion a broom and scout out a spot now while you figure out a plan if you like."

“Um, sure,” Harry agreed not sure what else to say. “Sounds good to me.” Harry watched Cal pull a broom from a cupboard on the back wall. With a tap, the broom disappeared followed by Cal doing the same to his cloak and fading from view. A soft crack signaled they were alone in the room. “Chamel, am I ready for this?”

“Ceps,” Tonks began. “This is just like anything else you have done. You know how this works. We go, we watch, and most likely nothing will happen. But knowing your luck we will find the main Death Eater hideout or something like that.”

With a chuckle, Harry nodded his agreement. “Yeah, Voldemort will probably stop by for tea and kill a few people for fun or half the city will go up in flames. So, we will most likely just watch an empty building and leave?”

“That is how it usually goes on these kinds of things.” Tonks gave Harry a quick hug before giving turning on the invisibility feature of her cloak.

Harry did the same before Apparating to Diagon Alley. They walked to Knockturn Alley arriving right behind the team of aurors who moved into the alley without a word. Harry looked down the alley and saw people move inside or into other side streets. As the aurors moved passed their destination, Tonks pulled Harry into a small alcove on the other side of the street from the location. Harry followed Tonks’ lead and settled into as comfortable a position as possible. He looked up at the skinny three-story building that looked like it was once a business many years ago and now maintained the role of a rundown and deserted structure fitted in between a dingy pub and a burnt out home.

Harry checked the building and saw nothing that hinted at any recent movement or habitation. The cobwebs behind the dirty windows revealed nothing to the happenings inside. No smoke escaped the chimney and the filth on the stoop looked undisturbed. Harry’s previous anger at Horace’s constant belittling subsided leaving a mild weariness in its wake. As the sun fought against the heavy clouds and the dismal ambiance of the alley, Harry waited for something to happen. His wait carried on for hours.

After the second hour of nothing, Tonks put up an invisible Privacy spell so she could talk to Harry safely. Deciding on a plan, Tonks threw up an Obscuring spell so people couldn't see what was going on behind it. The alcove was so small and shallow that Harry had to keep all of his activities confined to their protected space which wasn't any larger than an oversized cupboard.

At her direction, Tonks showed Harry how to cast the Privacy Dome and Obscuring spell. With the morning effectively spent and a modest meal consumed in shifts, Tonks began the process of teaching Harry how to cast the Message spell that the Unspeakables used to communicate. When the spell was cast, it was visible for less than a second and traveled at a high rate of speed towards its recipient. Many hours were spent sending messages back and forth while Harry learned how to include what he wanted and nothing he didn't. Some of his messages included embarrassing things that he didn't want Tonks to know about, at least not yet.

It took Harry until half past three to master the spell well enough to send an update to Horace on their progress or lack thereof. Cal had been keeping Tonks updated on what he saw or rather didn't see. As Tonks pointed out, the alley was especially quiet for some reason. Harry saw a few hags, and everyone who moved in the alley had dark cloaks wrapped around them.

As Harry sent Tonks a very teasing message, one from Cal came to him. *"Two black cloaked people coming from the north. Something not right about them. Be careful."* Harry looked to the north in time to see the pair come around a slight bend in the alley. He tapped Tonks' leg and motioned to the pair as they walked down the alley giving no one a second look. Harry tensed and waited for something to happen.

The two people separated as they neared the building and stood on either side of it. Harry watched the taller of the two as he stood near the stoop looking at the ground. He checked on the second person who was leaning against the brick wall on the other side of the building near the burnt out neighboring structure. Harry looked back to the taller person and waited with his hand on his wand.

A stifled, "Shite" from Tonks caused Harry to check on her finding nothing wrong. "What is it?" Harry asked as he looked back to the taller person who was still standing near the stoop with his head down.

"The other one disappeared," Tonks muttered. "And we missed it. Where the bloody hell did she go?"

"She?" Harry asked as he looked at the brick wall where the person had been standing moments before. "Where the hell did they go?"

"Yes, she," Tonks said. "You could tell by her walk. Women walk differently than men. Haven't you ever noticed that before?"

"Um," Harry mumbled before figuring that he might as well fess up. "To be honest, I always watched the women not the way they walked."

"Oh," Tonks sighed. "That is right you are a guy after all. I should have known better than to ask. But, yes, she was a woman. Her stride and body movement could only have been done by a woman and now she is Merlin knows where. We can't lose the second one too."

Harry stared at the tall man who remained standing with his head down. Things stayed that way for a few minutes. Two Unspeakables watched a cloaked man stand in a dreary alley for minutes that drug on forever. When another cloaked man stumbled by and entered the pub, the tall man moved. He wandered over to the brick wall and leaned against it.

With Harry and Tonks watching, the man faded into the brick and disappeared. "Bloody hell," a surprised Harry said. "He just went into that wall."

"Just like Platform Nine and Three Quarters and the St. Mungo's entrance," Tonks commented. "This is definitely not your run-of-the-mill hideouts. That spell is really hard to cast properly. People try it sometimes and the entrance comes and goes erratically or people often get stuck. Do you want to let Horace and Cal know about it?"

Before Harry could send off the update, a message from Cal relayed the fact that he saw both of them disappear. "Cal watched the first one disappear and wondered why we didn't grab up the second one. Would have been nice of him to let us know before it was too late, eh?"

"There are two of us and we should have called who we were going to watch," Tonks told Harry. "That was my mistake since I didn't tell you how we monitor people. You watch who you would fight should things go bad. Then you might know how the person moves and reacts to things before you need to attack them. Anyway, tell Horace that we have an important location and we need help if we are going to take it."

"Take it?" Harry asked confused as he sent off the message Tonks told him to send.

"Yes, take it," Tonks smirked keeping her eyes on the building. "Attack if you will. Makes for a much more fun day than just waiting and watching Dung's friends wander about this dreadful place. Now, we just have to wait for Horace to respond and then we do what he wants."

"Great," Harry replied. "He will probably tell me that I failed worse than he expected and send me home."

"Oh, Ceps," Tonks said softly. "Horace is just trying to push you. He is really impressed by what you have done so far and it shows to those of us who have been around for awhile. You can't see it yet, but he is very pleased with you. Give him some time and you will see it too."

Harry groaned as he waited with his wand in his hand. The pressure to succeed was weighing on him as he waited for the reply. A few battered old birds flew overhead and settled on a broken sign hanging over the pub. Harry stared at the wall willing someone to come out so he could prove himself on a real mission.

The reply came with an order to capture one of the people but let the other go without seeing anything. Harry relayed the message to his team and waited. As a mass of afternoon clouds rolled in front of the sun, a special kind of darkness shadowed the alley. Harry watched as

a person materialized out of the brick wall. The tall man had returned and moved back to his original spot near the stoop.

Harry started to stand, but Tonks held him back with a gentle touch of her hand. "Wait for it. If they came in a pair, most likely they will leave in a pair."

Harry settled himself and did as she asked and was rewarded with the woman appearing moments later. Both on their feet, Tonks removed the spells protecting their position and moved to the right side of the alley. Harry moved to the left side of the alley and cast the Silencing spell on his own feet to assure that he didn't tip off the tall man he followed.

Harry and Tonks followed the pair most of the way to Diagon alley before they separated. The woman looked around before Apparating away leaving Harry's man alone with Harry and Tonks on the ground and Cal watching from a nearby rooftop. Harry made his move and closed the distance between him and the man. In a flourish, Harry fired a Stunner followed by the Conligo Totalus binding spell.

The tall man toppled forward and cracked his head on the cobblestone path with considerable force. Harry ignored the sound of the man breaking at least one bone in his head and moved to drop the ring onto him. At a quick pace, Harry released the ring letting it fall on the man and whisk him away to an Unspeakable-controlled holding cell in the Ministry.

Harry started to stand up and relax from the tensions he had been saddled with until Tonks moved to him and kept him on pace to Diagon Alley. "Do not stop until we are completely clear of here. Monitors could be set up to watch the alley and offensive spells like that could have triggered them. The last thing we need is aurors flooding this alley looking for anyone with a wand. Questions are bad; you know this."

"Yes, sorry," Harry admitted as he thought through what she had said. They reached the main road and Tonks pulled Harry away from the Apparition point.

“That will be the first place they shut down when they get here if they come at all,” Tonks informed him. No sooner had she finished talking when about ten aurors appeared near the Apparition point. Four stayed near there and spoke with everyone who passed by while the remaining went directly to Knockturn Alley with their wands drawn. “Just made it in time. They will shut the alley down while they search for anyone who had been hit by the spells.”

“Wow, they are really quick at responding,” Harry said watching the aurors move into Knockturn Alley.”

“This is all Bones and her willingness to use the aurors the way they were meant to be used,” Tonks commented proudly. “If I wasn’t doing this, I would be with them right now. That is why I joined up in the first place. I love excitement, but being around you gives me enough right now. You are an exciting person to spend time with, Ceps.”

“One person’s excitement is another’s life threatening situation,” Harry quipped. “Boring appeals to me you know.”

“Yeah, until the second day when you have no idea what to do with yourself,” Tonks challenged. “You live on excitement the same as me. Now, tell Cal to head back. We will follow in a few minutes. I want to hear what they find in the alley.”

Harry sent the message off by directing it into a building first to hide the spell from the view of the busy alley. They moved nearer to the entrance of Knockturn Alley and listened in on the auror’s conversation.

“Detector picked up two offensive spells, a Stunner and Con Totalus.”

“I found a little blood over here, but no body and no tracks near it.”

“I saw no one.”

“I checked the alley and the nearest person was a drunkard coming out the pub down the way.”

“Forget this. Like anyone down here matters much.”

"You never know who was down here, Simmons. It could have been a common criminal or a lost child. Sadly, we won't know until someone reports them missing or their body turns up. Might as well do another walk-through since we are here. Let the others know, Simmons, since you can't be bothered to give a damn."

"Gladly."

Tonks grabbed Harry's arm and pulled him away. "Good, they found nothing to give them a lead, and they are going to sweep through the alley. Anyone who thought they saw something will forget it when the aurors show up. No reason to think about things that are best left ignored, eh?"

"Um, sure," Harry said in a non-committal way. He and Tonks moved into a darkened corner and Apparated back to the team room to find Cal waiting with his feet up and a cuppa in his hand.

"Bout time you showed up," Cal called laughing a little. "That was good work, Ceps. You dropped him and had him gone before he could even try to get up."

"I, uh, hit him with a Stunner and the Totalus spell we worked on recently," Harry said hesitantly. "If he got up I would have been worried."

"Well," Cal began and thought on it before continuing. "That explains why he went down so hard. Good work. Want to stop by Hospital and see your handy work? There is no way he didn't break something on that fall. He couldn't catch himself, and he was a tall bugger."

"Ah, no thanks," Harry refused. "I heard the bones break when he landed. That was enough for me for today. All I know is that I didn't break any bones for once, and I am happy about that."

Tonks smirked and laughed. "Small miracles, that. Time to check in with Horace and head home."

The team made their way to Horace's office and found it empty. They went to Marcus's and were greeted with both Marcus and Horace along with Team Five. The discussion was not pleasant in nature.

“That was a quality mission and you gave it to them to fuck up?” Jones yelled.

“Jones,” Marcus attempted to calm the tone of the meeting. “That mission had the lowest chance of being something. Yours was much higher on the list of ending up as a real mission. You know how it works.”

“This is bullshit,” Jones continued as Michael sighed and sat in a chair against the far wall. He crossed his legs and folded his arms catching sight of Harry in the doorway. A subtle wave told Harry that he wasn’t part of the argument. “We have been looking for Carrows for years. We know he was involved in that disaster back in the eighties. I read the report on him.”

“Be that as it may,” Marcus replied. “We had no knowledge that he was going to be there nor for that fact did we know that anyone was going to be there. Second guessing this will only anger you more.”

“We could have gotten both of them,” Jones countered showing that he had little control over himself.

“Enough!” Horace snapped moving away from the wall behind Marcus’s desk. “Shut the fuck up, Jones. I have had enough of your childish behaviour. You are either an Unspeakable or some twat on the street. It is time for you to make the choice. Which is it?”

“What?” Jones asked more subdued than Harry had ever seen him before.

“I have had it with this petty shite,” Horace bellowed. “You are a team member, or you are out. No more of this “it should have been me” rubbish. Three got the mission that turned out to be viable. They executed the mission as instructed. They only got one of them because I only asked for one of them. If we had more history of the team under Ceps, I would have asked them to get both. I decided that one for sure was better than missing both and revealing our knowledge of the location. I made the call and Three did the job.”

Jones breathed heavily and it was obvious that he was still furious at what had happened. “Forget it then.” Jones turned to leave the room

and immediately saw Harry standing in the doorway flanked by Cal and Chamel. "Move, fucker."

Harry didn't want to prolong the meeting with Jones so he moved aside letting him pass without a comment. As the tension wavered, Michael spoke up.

"He has been getting worse since the spot opened up. He figured it was his by rights and when you brought in Ceps he became completely unhinged. I feel that if we get into something for real, his state of mind as it is, he will kill only himself if we are lucky. A reassignment might give him a chance to reassess his goals but I doubt it. Taruse and I are in agreement on this."

Taruse nodded as he slipped his hands into his pockets. Horace looked to Marcus and waited. "I would love to remove him," Marcus said shaking his head. "But I can't right now. We have work coming in on a daily basis right now and I need every team we have. Granted Jones is not at his best, but he has never allowed his over-aggressive tendencies to get in the way before. If you can work with him until this flurry of events is over, I will pull him then."

Michael wasn't pleased with the answer, but he accepted it. "Michael," Horace stepped forward. "We are looking for a replacement already. It may take awhile, but we are searching. An auror or two show the makings of a good Operative, but I know you have your reservations with them. They aren't your normal aurors at least. Give us some time, okay. If he wants to go down in a storm of spells, do not risk your lives to stop him. I hate to say it, but the job has gone to his head in a bad way."

Michael shook Horace's hand and nodded to Marcus. As he and Taruse passed Harry, they paused. "Good job today, Ceps. Don't let this drama get to you. He didn't get like this overnight. Chamel, Cal, pleasure as always."

Harry watched the room empty of two and fill with his team. "Excellent work, Ceps," Marcus said. "Previous rantings aside, you did a superb job today, all of you. You got another Death Eater and confirmed one of their locations. I will assign Team One to continue the surveillance

on the building. We might be able to get a few more Death Eaters off the streets before they shut down the location and move on.”

“A successful first mission,” Horace broke in far calmer than he had been before. “Acceptable work I must admit although, Ceps, must you damage them before you bring them in? The healers had to fix his broken ocular sockets, but they left nose at least. Now, you are cleared for the night. Be here tomorrow for a new mission or training. I am not sure what we will have so be ready for anything.”

Harry and Tonks returned home and were in time for dinner with Remus and the Grangers. Hermione pressed Harry for more information but relented when he refused to answer certain questions. Harry helped Remus teach Hermione how to Apparate after they overcame her adherence to the laws by using her near death as motivation to learn the skill. Her progression was slow but methodical as only Hermione could manage. Her shields were also improving and showing promise.

Tuesday and Wednesday came and went with little excitement at home other than Harry finding out about Jules not liking Remus even more than her dislike for Tonks. Remus explained it away as her seeing him as a threat to Harry since he was a werewolf. Harry had a long, one-side conversation with Jules that left Harry tired and frustrated and Jules unchanged in her actions towards Remus. Begrudgingly, Harry accepted the fact that some things were just meant to be. Hermione and her parents seemed comfortable as they took to Potter Estate rather well. Harry’s only concern was how tired Hermione seemed to look in the mornings.

Work was more training as the other teams took on the missions that seemed promising. Most were fruitless wastes of time, but Team One managed to ferry away another Death Eater from the Knockturn location on Wednesday. The woman hadn’t been seen again but at least two unique people had been identified as frequent users of the location.

Thursday came and it was the day that Marcus chose to shutdown the Knockturn location completely. The briefing and planning session was something that Harry wanted to avoid. He hoped that Team Five

wasn't part of the mission since the rumour of Jones's opinion of Ceps had spread quickly among the teams even before half of Tuesday had transpired. When Harry entered the training room, he sighed an anxious breath when he didn't see Jones waiting in the room.

Harry picked out the shape that matched Thor's and quickly figured out that the other two were the remaining members of Team Two, Robeen and Joslin. When everyone was seated, Marcus stood and clasped his hands together.

"It is a wonderful day today," Marcus announced. "We have Team One sitting on the house and they have counted at least two occupants inside the house that haven't left through the front door. They have also checked the wards on the building and determined that there are Anti-Apparition and Portkey wards along with the standard detection and alarm ones. The entrance is a work of art though and must be breeched with sheer force to access the structure since we lack the passwords and insider to trigger it.

"We have selected Team Two for your consistency with these kinds of missions and Team Three since it was yours first and we would like to let you prove yourselves even more. I will let Horace handle the specifics of the mission. I will say this is a level Two or Three mission depending on the amount of resistance we encounter."

Horace moved forward and tapped the board at the front of the room revealing a map of the alley and the surrounding buildings. "When we arrive, Team Two will group to the south and Team Three will group to the north. We will wait for the aurors to sweep through and clear the streets before moving in. This is going to happen in thirty minutes so remember that. Everyone will be concealed until given the order to strike. We are hoping to catch at least one more person before attacking. Team One thinks there is a shift schedule at work here and the shift change happens shortly after the aurors move through. We figure that is because it reduces the number of people to see them come and go.

"Does anyone have concerns about this mission or the people they will be working with?" No one said a word giving Horace reason to

smile. "Team Two will be the tip of the spear and Three will follow them in if needed. I may have Ceps help with the entry since he packs a punch with his spells. I am not giving you permission to enter the structure first, Ceps. Keep that in mind before you get carried away.

"A staffing notice pertinent to this mission, Gillian has been promoted to an operation specialist. As a four pip, she can and may change the orders I give to you now. Follow her orders as if I was yelling them in your ear myself. She has the most up-to-date picture of the situation. Most of what we know has come from them and their work in the last few days. I have full confidence in her as should you."

The team members nodded their acceptance of the information. Harry followed along since he had no clue why it was such a big deal. Horace outlined the approach and the suggested spells to use to breach the wards and entrance. The precise spell work to counter some of the wards was left to Team One, but Harry learned that the Reductor Curse and the Killing Curse were very effective at beating down wards. Many other spells could be deflected or redirected by the wards, but the Killing Curse couldn't be altered at all and the Reductor Curse simply exploded on contact leaving nothing to be changed.

As Harry replayed the night at the Grangers in his mind, he could remember seeing and hearing muffled Reductor Curses now that he had an idea of what to look for. Horace gave them suggestions if things went one way or another. He told them to look out for witnesses or potential victims and to put up Obscuring Charms to keep spectators to a minimum. As the briefing came to a close, Harry started feeling the onset of the nerves he was so used to before Quidditch matches.

Portkeys marked with a "C" for the holding cells were on a table in the rear of the classroom area. Harry grabbed two and stowed them in his pocket. Seeing a chance to find a few minutes to himself to gain control of his stomach and wild thoughts, Harry drifted to the side of the room near the exit. With a few deep breaths and a focused effort on Occlumency, he worked on clearing his mind and concentrating on the task at hand. He reasoned that it was no different than earlier in

the week when he had taken down the tall man. The only thing that was different was the build up of tension that was occurring prior to leaving on the mission.

While wrapped up in his thoughts, Harry felt a soft hand slide over his shoulders before settling in the small of his back for a few seconds before wandering on. Knowing that only one person in the room would have done it, Harry kept his eyes closed and enjoyed the sensations. Warm breath on his neck and ear told him that she was about to tell him something.

"You will be fine, Harry," Tonks whispered. "When this is all over, I promise a long soak in that wonderful tub of yours. I might even allow you to touch me if you are good."

"You mean I will be welcomed in your bath?"

"I was promising a bath with both of us, silly," Tonks purred. "What kind of person would I be to take a bath alone while you sulked in the corner? It is much more enjoyable to share a bath especially when you are involved. Oh the fun we will have..."

Harry found his mind more relaxed after a minute of whispering from Tonks than ten minutes of Occlumency on his own. The only side effect was the need to adjust himself to compensate for his shifted focus from danger to pleasure. Returning the favour, Harry leaned in and whispered in Tonks' ear. "I will hold you to that promise, Nymphadora." Harry put extra effort into sounding as seductive as he could given his limited experience with the skill.

As Tonks removed her hand from the back of Harry's neck, he opened his eyes and saw her looking at him. The twinkle in her eyes was different from the humour or teasing moods she often showed him. It was something different and he felt more than saw the difference. She directed her head towards the groups telling him that they were about to leave.

With a cleansing breath, Harry turned and strode towards Cal and Team Two. The teams formed and Apparated away one-by-one as not to alert anyone before it was needed. Harry, Tonks, and Cal moved among the busy crowds in Diagon Alley. Many children were

out and running around leaving their parents to chase after them with frustrated calls of punishment or idle threats.

"What is going on?" Harry asked Tonks softly from a side street at least a good forty feet from the entrance to Knockturn Alley.

"Not sure," Tonks replied, "but most of them are younger so it isn't Hogwarts' letters. It might be family day or something like that. Bugger if it is."

Harry did his best to ignore the itch in his head that told him things could go terribly wrong if any of the Death Eaters got away. They could run into the Alley and kill a few kids before escaping. Those images left a taste so bitter in his mouth that Harry felt his magic swell up inside of him without the normal mental or emotional effort to achieve the same effect.

Stamping down on the horrible thoughts, Harry hurried between family groups to the mouth of Knockturn Alley in time to see a group of aurors disappear around the bend. Once Tonks and Cal joined him, Harry led them into the alley. The gloom of the street made the day seem even more foreboding as they walked slowly and silently to the same alcove they had used before.

Protections in place, Harry sent a message to Gillian telling her they were ready. Seconds later, he received a return message, "*Waiting on the aurors to leave the alley before we do anything.*" Harry placed his hands on his team to signal that they weren't ready to go yet. The minutes passed and Harry felt the anxiousness of earlier return with a vengeance. His mental efforts only held off the thoughts enough to prevent them from dominating his mood. A "*Ready*" message broke him out of his stupor.

"Be ready to go," Harry told his team as he prepared himself to launch repeated spells at the brick wall that was the doorway to the structure. Harry received a countdown message giving them one minute before they attacked. As the time ticked down, Harry's mind slipped into a semi-numb state of alertness. With ten seconds left, a frantic "*Hold*" message reached him stalling the attack.

“What is going on?” Harry asked those who didn’t know. He only had to wait a few seconds longer before he saw the reason. Three black cloaked people strolled into the alley. One was the same woman that Harry had seen at the beginning of the week. He recognized the walk since he had replayed it in his mind a few times trying to see what Tonks had meant. She tapped him on the shoulder telling him she saw the same thing.

They watched as she leaned against the wall and disappeared as she had done before. The only difference was the fact that the other two took up positions on either side of the building in what would be considered a guarding posture. “Bollocks. If we attack now then we have to drop those two before we do anything else.”

Seconds later, Harry received a new countdown order. *“One minute, attack the one on the right before leveling the entrance. No holding back, this is a level three mission now. If your first spell misses, kill the guard without hesitation.”*

Harry sighed and relayed the message to his team. He selected his spell, a Stunner followed up immediately by the binding spell he used the last time. He figured that if the first one was blocked the second would slip through any defenses since it required a completely different shield spell to block. His third spell would have to be the Killing Curse since those were the orders. Harry hoped it wouldn’t be necessary.

The seconds passed and the assault began lighting the alley with an array of spells. Harry jumped forward and shot his combo at the man on the right. The man was ready for an attack somehow and blocked the Stunner, but the binding spell breeched his shield and dropped the Death Eater. Harry turned to fire at the brick wall in time to see the other guard fall victim to a Killing Curse from a member of Team Two.

Harry began the process of firing Reductor Curses, one right after another, as fast as he could. He didn’t notice Tonks Stun his Death Eater nor Summon the fallen wand away as he fell into a rhythm. Harry sent the spell repeatedly at the wall as a soft ethereal reverb

sounded from somewhere. He let his magic take over as he repeated the thought in his head triggering the Reductor Curse to be sent.

Members of Team Two joined in the assault with their own spells. Two used the Reductor Curse while Harry noticed a steady stream of the twisted, sickly green light coming from another. As they fired continuously, Harry started seeing chunks of brick break away from the wall and fly in all directions. A fine rust coloured dust hung in the air as the light from the spells illuminated it.

Harry watched the particles swirl around as the spells changed the air pressure near the wall. He began to feel the ebb-and-flow sensation again and let it happen without resisting. A few minutes into the attack, the wall cracked under the magical force of the spells and fell inward. Harry let three spells travel into the building before Team Two had reached the hole and moved in.

When Harry stopped casting spells in time with his magical surges, his wand emitted a few sparks keeping up with the tide inside of him. He moved his team into a guard position near the opening and stayed there as they had been briefed to do earlier. The excitement of the situation left his senses heightened, but his nerves had calmed the same as they often did during a game of Quidditch.

A shout of help forced him into action again as he dove into the building ready to help the other team. When he rushed through the hanging cloud of debris, he was met with utter destruction inside the house. The far wall had a hole in it that a person could climb through and the furniture in the front room had been thrown backwards with such force that parts of it stuck out of the side and rear walls. The true destructive power of magic displayed itself for any witness.

Harry heard shouts and saw flashes up the stairwell on his right. He sprinted over a shattered crate and ducked under a hanging ceiling beam that had been severed. The floor above him creaked from the movement of the others. He bounded up the stairs taking them two at a time reaching the first landing halfway between levels. When Harry turned the corner, wand out, he saw a fallen Death Eater splayed out eagle, face down, on the stairs. Blood had pooled on the upper step

and was running over the lip of the stair falling on the lower step in a steady drip into a ever-growing pool of red.

Leaping over the blood coated stairs completely, Harry landed on the top step only to slip on the plaster dust that had been exploded from the wall. As Harry fell to the floor, hard, a spell whizzed past his head and hit an undamaged chair leaving it in flames. He rolled to the side, out of the hallway, and into an adjoining room. A quick scan showed the room clear of people giving Harry a chance to regain his feet.

A deep breath stolen from the fast moving events, Harry moved out of the room and hurried towards the shouts and lights. The long corridor showed signs of increasing magical damage as he grew closer to the main fight. When the doorway was breeched, Harry found three Unspeakables battling five Death Eaters in a vicious battle. With a growl, Harry jumped into the fight firing the Bone spells at the black robed enemies.

It was easy for Harry to see that the Death Eaters in the room were skilled fighters. They moved to the far ends of the room to avoid deflected spells or getting in the way of others meant for someone else. Harry chose the nearest enemy and attacked. His opponent didn't have an Unspeakable personally attacking him so the fight became a one-on-one fight for life.

Harry was glad that his guy didn't use the Killing Curse, but the frequent Cruciatus Curses kept Harry moving or putting up his marble shield. After a series of Reductor, Stunner, Conligo, and both bone spells, Harry landed the Severing Ribbon spell and removed the man's right hand. Harry tried to look away in time, but he saw the wand snap in half and three fingers fall to the floor trailed by a stream of blood.

More out of self preservation than anything, Harry Stunned the man to end the screaming. Swallowing the bile that was creeping up his throat, Harry took on the next target. The man was slower but very efficient with every spell he cast. Harry fired spells as fast as he could to overwhelm the man. As the volume of spells grew, the slower man couldn't keep up and was struck with the Bone Breaking one to the left shoulder followed up by a Stunner.

The group of Death Eaters had been moving back as the fight advanced. Numbers against them, the Death Eaters started using more area spells and less target specific ones. An Unspeakable fell when his shield collapsed under the force of two spells at once from two of the more skilled Death Eaters. Harry slid over and took up the attacker his fallen ally had been fighting. Two Death Eaters ran for a doorway leaving the last one to fight off three Unspeakables alone.

Harry sent three consecutive Reductors at him while Robeen or Joslin sent Stunners. With the Death Eater effectively distracted, Thor ended the fight with a Killing Curse. Before the black cloak had even touched the ground, Thor was past him and moving after the others. Harry hesitated a second and saw Robeen or Joslin send off two messages before chasing after Thor. Harry went to follow them, but saw the doorway led to another stairwell. Thinking quickly, Harry retraced his steps and returned to the front stairs.

Jumping over the blood pool and fallen person again, Harry reached the bottom of the stairs. He heard shouting in the rear of the building and a few errant spells struck the hall across the way. Harry gave a quick look in the direction of the fight and saw the Death Eaters retreating towards him. Harry decided to wait for them to pass in front of him so he could hit them from the side. A thought of attacking from behind was stomped out of his mind when a Killing Curse struck the floor in the hallway and tore up a handful of boards and material from under the floor.

Harry continued taking quick looks to monitor their progress. He saw Thor send a Reductor Curse at the woman and missed by only a few inches but it caught her hood and sent it flying. Harry's brain skipped a beat when he saw the long dark hair of Bellatrix Lestrange. Once he had regained thought, Harry realized that the battle had brought them into his hallway. His heart beating wildly and hands sweaty, Harry saw the edge of a black cloak and a foot step into his view from the stairway.

With a growl, Harry fired a series of Bone Shattering spells at the Death Eater. In a chance of terrible luck, the Death had moved beyond the doorway and the spells missed him and leveled the far wall instantly. Bellatrix held up her retreat as her partner fired two

quick spells at Harry sending him for cover and allowing her to fallback to the alley exit.

Angry at himself, Harry ducked out into the hallway and continued his attack on the evil pair trying to escape. Harry ignored the man and focused on Bellatrix. He herded them down the hall and out of the destroyed entrance. A shout and a series of spells proved that Cal and Tonks were waiting. The man sent up a shield and moved away quickly before tucking his hand into his pocket and disappearing leaving Bellatrix alone to fight or flee.

Harry saw his window of revenge closing and he seized the chance to stop her. He dropped all offensive spells except for the Cruciatus Curse and he used it as aggressively as he could. Bellatrix backed up and away from Harry's attacks as he ran from the building after her. The battle lit the alley as they traded Crucios. Team Two moved out of the building and held back from joining the battle since they were more likely to get hit than help in anyway.

Harry poured his magic into every spell he cast at the woman who had killed Sirius. A shout of pain and determination grew as he fought her. She always seemed to stay half a second ahead of his attack, but most of her return volleys were miss aimed because she had to dodge an attack. Harry advanced on her only to slip a little on a broken cobblestone from a missed spell.

The break in his attack was enough time to let Bellatrix land a quick Crucio and Apparate away saving her life and freedom. Harry felt the white hot knives strike at every nerve ending causing him to stumble. His anger and fury chased away the pain as his frustration boiled over at letting her get away.

"Fuck!" Harry yelled as he stared at where she had stood seconds before. "So fucking close and she gets away. God dammit!" Harry swung his fists in a half circle stopping them in front of himself before turning around. He saw Thor standing proud and dusting off his cloak while the other member of Team Two sent off a quick message before reentering the building. Three new people appeared in the street dressed in the same Unspeakable cloaks and spilt up. Two followed the man into the building while the third moved to Tonks and

Cal who had just walked out of the alcove they had hidden themselves in.

“Chamel, Cal, Thor,” a woman barked. “Two people to the south saw what happened and one to the north. Wipe their memories of these events and us. Ceps, get over here.”

Harry assumed that the woman was Gillian since he had never met another female Unspeakable other than Tonks. He looked at Tonks and saw her give him a wide smile and nod reassuringly to him before hurrying up the street to find the witness. As Cal and Thor passed Harry, Cal told him he had done well and Thor clapped him firmly on the shoulder.

“Damn fine job, Ceps,” Thor commented as he followed Cal in search of their witnesses.

Harry took a few breaths to calm his mind and body before he allowed himself to move at all. His magic was humming in his ears and he didn’t want to have an accident involving it when Gillian was going to talk to him. He took slow deliberate steps towards her as he calmed down as much as he could. The street was littered with evidence from the fight. The missed spells left large scorch marks on the buildings and the street. Stones were loose, broken, or completely missing from the alley.

The broken sign above the pub had been obliterated and all that remained was the twisted hanger bent in every direction but the right one. A faint trail of smoke escaped the second floor window of the building as sounds from inside made their way through the shattered windows and holes in the walls. Harry took the last few steps and came to a rest in front of Gillian and looked up at her expectantly.

She seemed to debate something for a second before speaking. “Report.”

Not sure what to say, Harry did what he did best; he started talking and thinking at the same time. “Bellatrix Lestrangle and another man got away. One of our guys fell from two spells inside. One Death Eater was bleeding on the steps pretty badly, another was killed by the Killing Curse. I severed another’s hand and Stunned him, and

then broke another's shoulder and Stunned him as well. Then the two out here which," Harry looked around and saw they were gone, "are gone."

Gillian nodded before sending a message into the sky. "Excellent job, Ceps. Aside from going after Lestrage by yourself and getting injured, you did better than I expected."

"Injured?" Harry checked himself and saw nothing out of place or bleeding for once. "I am not injured."

"Unless you walk like your leg is four inches too short," Gillian said, "you are injured. Medical for you. We have things in hand here. Go, you earned it."

Harry started to argue but stopped himself before anything more than a few stutters left his lips. With a weary sigh, Harry Apparated back to the team room. His landing was terrible, because his hip gave out causing him to fall to the floor. "Bloody hell that didn't work right." He ran his hands down to his hip and applied a little pressure. The shooting pain told him that he did need medical attention after all.

Gritting his teeth, Harry pushed himself over to the couch and pulled himself to his feet. "I will be damned if I don't walk there myself."

Tonks found her witness and Obliviated the hag with nary a thought. She wanted to get back to Harry and make sure he was alright. *'He is never careful when things like this happen. He could have a broken arm or leg and not know it.'* She turned around and hurried back find Harry.

Tonks reached the building in time to see Harry Apparate away and not looking happy. She rushed over to Gillian to see what was going on. The damage to the building was terminal, but the alley fared far better. As she dodged debris, Tonks was close enough to hear what Gillian said after Harry left.

"Silent Apparition? I thought they were pulling my leg." Gillian turned to come face-to-face with Tonks. "Chamel, as long as Joslin is alive and healable this was a superb mission. Six Death Eaters captured or killed is a victory for us all."

“Whatever,” Tonks waved off the numbers without a thought. “Where did Ceps go? Was he alright?” Gillian settled back on her feet and made an odd sound. “Not now, Gillian.”

“Fine, fine,” Gillian replied. “Ceps had something wrong with his foot, leg, or hip. I do not know which, but I sent him to Medical either way. He did really well in there; he did even better out here. Did you see who he was fighting at the end? That was Lestrage and he seemed to hold his own pretty well until he slipped.”

Tonks scanned the area before asking to be released from the scene so she could check on Harry. Gillian agreed after a little chiding and subtle hints. Tonks Apparated away as Gillian used her wand to clear the street of any loose wreckage that had been left in the alley.

She appeared in the team room and bolted into the hallway in time to see the doors to the medical wing close. Sprinting the length of the hallway to Medical, Tonks burst into the room to see Harry pushed down onto a bed by one of the healers.

“You again,” he snapped. “One day you aren’t going to be so lucky and end up dead, Ceps. You know this right?”

“If you call my life luck,” Harry countered, “you can have it. This isn’t even the worst of it. So, what is wrong with me this time?”

“Not knowing when to hold back,” Tonks laughed as she moved to Harry’s bedside. “But you already knew that so I guess I have to give you something new that is wrong with you.”

The healer moved his wand around Harry spending extra time on his left leg and hip. “Cracked femur, dislocated hip, bruising, and short-duration Cruciatus exposure. A rather varied selection of injuries this time. Now, hold still while I get the proper potions for you.”

The healer moved away so Tonks moved in close. “You did a great job, Harry,” she whispered. “I am so proud of you. You earned your bath tonight and then some. You get better so we can have some fun.”

"I will try, Nymph," Harry said with a sigh. "I am tired of getting hurt all the time. Can't I just stay safe for once?"

"As long as you do this job," Tonks smirked, "you will always be at risk. As long as you act the way you do, you will always get hurt." Tonks laughed at him as she said the last part and rubbed his head. "I can handle the injuries as long as you stay alive."

"I only hope I can as well," Harry joked as the healer returned to tend to him.

"Drink these," the healer ordered handing Harry three bottles and vials of varying sizes with different coloured mixtures in them. "The pain should subside in a few minutes and everything should start knitting itself back together. Tell me when you feel your bones starting to itch. That is when I have to cast some spells to make sure everything goes back together properly."

"Sounds fun," Harry said between drinks.

The doors swung open as a body floated through the air ahead of an Unspeakable. "Joslin is down," Robeen yelled. Two other healers ran from the back room and took over directing the body into a bed. There was a flurry of movement and orders as Joslin was cared for. Spells were cast and a few potions were gathered and poured down his throat. Harry watched them work and wondered how many times he had received the same kind of treatment over the years.

Speers spoke to Robeen loud enough for everyone to hear. "The combination of the spells overcame his shield and he collapsed, is that right?"

"Yeah," Robeen said. "That is what happened."

"So the spells went through his shield or were at least affected by it?" Robeen nodded. "Lucky for him that only one of the spells was meant to kill him. If both had been that way, he would have died there. One was a Stunner, albeit a dark Stunner, but the other was some form of the Organ Decay Curse that I haven't seen before. We should be able to counter the effects in a few days. Give us an hour and I should be able to give you an accurate answer."

"Thank you," Robeen said before stepping back and letting his shoulders fall. He looked around the room after a few minutes. Upon seeing Harry and Tonks, he moved to join them. "You okay, Ceps?"

"I am fine," Harry replied getting a stern look from Tonks. "I am well enough, considering. I will be fine in a little while. I am sorry about Joslin; I should have tried harder."

Robeen laughed lightly before waving away the comment. "Any harder and the building would have collapsed in on us. I could feel your power as you hit the doorway, but that was nothing compared to you attacking Lestrage. Is there some history there that I don't know about?"

Harry thought for a few seconds before replying. "I want that woman to suffer, but I would accept seeing her in prison."

"I would have guessed you wanted her dead," Robeen offered with a hint of humour to his voice. "Maybe next time, you will get to see her suffer or "in prison" at the end of it all. I know I wouldn't mind seeing that. You did a wonderful job today. No matter what anyone says or suggests, you earned my respect and that of my team. If I didn't know for a fact that Thor was straight, I would think he *"liked"* you or something the way he goes on about you. He values the ability to fight and win above all else. You keep showing us that you can do that."

"Thanks, Robeen," Harry answered. He took a deep breath as a sudden, odd feeling swept through him. "Ah, Chamel, I think that itching thing the healer was talking about is happening. I want it to stop as fast as possible so could you let them know please." Harry felt his magic surge up in response to the uncomfortable feelings racing through his bones. The urge to dig at his skin in an attempt reach his skeleton was nearly overpowering his mental control.

"How are you doing?" The healer asked.

"Make it stop," Harry requested.

The healer slowly waved her wand over Harry as it lit with a soft pink light. She moved methodically and precisely over every inch of

Harry's body. As the wand passed an area, the sensations lessened but didn't go away completely. On the second pass, Harry felt the weird urges fade away. He sighed in relief and let his head sink into the pillow. "Thank Merlin that is over," Harry mumbled.

"It is as it should be now," the healer said before continuing. "You need to stay off your feet for a day or two. If you must move about, use a cane. The bones are healed but there was some soft tissue damage from the dislocation that needs as neutral a position as possible to heal correctly. Of your options, which do you chose?"

"Bollocks," Harry murmured. "Fine, the cane I guess, but it is under protest."

"Protest all you want as long as you use it," the healer answered. "I am only trying to help you. It will not be me with permanent joint damage in ten years if you disregard my orders. I can hold you here until tomorrow if you like that option better?" The healer smirked at Harry as he weighed his very limited options.

With a disgruntled sigh, Harry held his hand out for the cane. A Summoning spell later, Harry had a polished wooden cane in his hand and a victorious healer standing over his bed. "Glad you saw it my way, Ceps."

"Bully for you," Harry grunted as he tried to swing his feet off the bed. With Tonks' assistance, Harry managed to stand even though his hip screamed in pain. "How long until the pain goes away?"

"I am surprised you stayed on your feet, actually," the shocked healer said. "Well, here is a pain potion that should get you through the worst of it. Remember to keep your weight off of it as much as possible."

Harry downed the potion and dropped the vial on the vacated bed. "I wish Joslin luck in getting better," Harry told Robeen.

"Luck has nothing to do with it, Ceps," the healer told him.

"All the same," Harry turned and aimed his laboured steps towards the door. Tonks walked with him and offered him support for his other

side as he walked. Harry quickly learned how to manage the cane, Tonks, and walking. By the time he reached Marcus's office, he was going at about half his normal walking speed.

Tonks knocked on the door and it opened revealing Cal, Thor, Gillian, and her team along with Marcus and Horace. They kept talking but each looked at the door in turn. Once Marcus finished hearing what had happened from their sides, he looked to Harry. "I would like to hear what happened in your words, Ceps." Harry gave his account as he took a seat in a vacant chair that seemed to be left open for a reason.

"As long as Joslin makes a full recovery," Horace prompted, "this will be a successful day. I congratulate all three teams on carrying out this important and potentially disastrous mission."

"I second that sentiment," Marcus followed up. "Superb job, all of you."

"I would like Ceps to receive extra acknowledgement for today," Gillian spoke up. "He made the whole thing work. He breeched the wall faster than we expected and he provided assistance when it was needed. Robeen told me that they were only just holding their own against the Death Eaters inside until Ceps arrived. He changed the tide and allowed us to achieve what we did with minimal loses or even the chance at loses. He proved himself to me today."

Harry accepted Gillian's words but didn't believe them. The years of his exposure to the Dursleys prevented him from taking the praise to heart. He looked around the room and found everyone looking at him. Horace broke the silence first.

"Injured again, I see. What you won't do to get out of training." Horace smirked for a second before turning cold again. "Monday for Team Three. Should give Ceps enough time to heal up and get his beauty sleep."

The meeting broke up shortly after Marcus praised all of the teams again for their expert execution in achieving their goals. When Harry and Tonks started back to the team room so they could Apparate

home, Horace followed them from a few feet behind. Once they entered the room, Horace closed the door behind them.

"You told us you didn't have a vendetta to settle with Lestrage," Horace growled. "Today you showed me that you do have one and it could get in the way of our missions. Fortunately, no one was killed because of it, but we may not be so lucky tomorrow or the next time. I suggest you use your time off getting your head squared away and putting this behind you. I do not want you getting yourself killed or your team killed because you want her dead for what she did to someone you cared about. There are others here with bones to pick with that woman. You do not own exclusive rights to hating her."

Harry closed his mouth, tightly, as he stared Horace down. "Noted," Harry forced out not giving away anything. Horace watched him for a few seconds before giving him a sharp nod and left the room.

Tonks ran her hand behind Harry's back and pulled his hood down. She looked into his eyes and watched the simmering anger settle then lessen. She smiled and kissed him softly. "Well done, Harry. You did brilliantly today. I owe you one bath for two at your request."

"I doubt we will be able to get home and up to our room without someone noticing. We might have to hold off on it until later."

Tonks nibbled on her lip seductively before pressing her body against his. She changed back to her normal appearance letting her breasts grow a little. "Just let me know, Harry." He groaned when Tonks moved away and grabbed his hand. "To home we go."

They Apparated away and reappeared in the foyer. Harry dropped Tonks' hand and saw her shift back into the Tonks most people saw on a daily basis. Harry walked into the living room leaning heavily on his cane heading for the empty couch and ignoring the gasp from Hermione.

"Harry, what happened?" She demanded as expected.

"What?" Harry asked weakly. "Oh, this. Nothing much. Don't worry about it. I will be fine by tomorrow. What did you do today?"

Hermione wanted to press the issue, but she saw Harry staring her down telling her to drop it. Huffing, Hermione told him. "I spent the morning reading and the afternoon trying to Apparate with Remus. I have almost got it and I am getting quieter every time."

"She is doing a wonderful job," Remus said watching Harry intently. "She will get it in a few days or less. Care to share your day with us?"

"Not now, Moony," Harry smiled his best mischief-laden smile. "Not now."

Friday and Saturday were spent with Harry watching and coaching Hermione in her attempts to Apparate and her shield work. Per the doctor's and Tonks' orders, Harry spent most of both days sitting in a chair or laying on a couch. On Sunday morning, Hedwig arrived during breakfast with a piece of parchment tied to her leg. Harry untied it and read what was written.

"We have a meeting with the goblins today to review their progress and key the wards to you three," Harry explained. "Hermione will be the only one to have the ability to add people since she is the only magical person in your family. Griphook said they will be finished with the wards tonight and we need to be at your house no later than six."

"We are going home, tonight?" Hermione asked surprised. "I figured it would take a few more days to finish them."

"Don't you want to go home, honey?" David asked her.

"It is not that I don't want to go home," Hermione told her parents. "It's that I want to keep learning and practicing magic. I have learned so much in the last week. I can almost Apparate, and I can do shields that I didn't even know about before I came here. Not to mention all the other spells I have worked on at night."

"You were supposed to be asleep when we went to bed," Jane scolded her daughter.

"Well," Hermione looked at the floor as she hung her head guiltily. "It is not every day that you get to practice magic like this. A little lost sleep was worth the knowledge." Hermione had raised her head as

she spoke and looked more defiant at the end of telling her parents that she had traded sleep for learning magic.

“Nothing new there,” Harry joked as he nipped into his pancakes and sausage.

“What do you mean, Harry?” Jane asked.

“Hermione is used to studying instead of sleeping,” Harry answered getting a kick in the shins for his loose lips.

Her parents noticed the exchange and sighed as one. “Hermione,” David spoke in a defeated way. “You haven’t changed one bit, have you?”

“No, daddy, I have not,” Hermione responded holding her head high. “It should be no surprise to either of you.”

The Grangers agreed that they weren’t really surprised, but they expressed disapproval in her methods of gaining the knowledge.

Night came as Harry prepared the portkey back to the Granger’s home. He smirked at Hermione as she watched him intently trying to figure out how to cast the difficult spell. He wiggled his eyebrows at her as he tapped the ring making it glow blue.

“You have to tell me how to do that,” Hermione sternly told him.

“But it is against the law to make an unregistered portkey, Hermione,” Harry prodded.

“Stuff the law,” she uttered before covering her mouth with both hands in shock as she looked to her surprised parents.

Harry looked to Tonks and smirked. “I blame Ron for her attitude towards the law. I am as shocked as anyone at her behaviour.” Harry laughed as Hermione recovered enough to smack him in the head.

“Both of you are bad influences on me,” she said while laughing herself.

"You allow it to happen, dear," Jane offered joining in the humour of the situation.

"You corrupted the Grangers as well," Tonks mentioned to Harry as she smiled at both parents. "You are a bad boy."

"Going to punish him, Tonks?" Remus asked enjoying Harry's shock at the suggestion being made.

"In the worst way, Remus," Tonks replied giving Harry a kiss and mussing his hair happily.

"Enough of having a go at me," Harry announced ending the fun at his expense. "Does this place make you childish or something?" Harry asked no one in particular while scanning the living room suspiciously.

"You do, Harry," Tonks answered keeping a straight face.

"Hey!" Harry exclaimed while everyone grabbed a hold of the portkey, and any belonging they had brought along, causing it to take them to the park near Hermione's house.

They arrived behind some bushes and started the short walk to the home. Harry took the lead checking for any dangers. They arrived at the address and found the house missing.

"My house!" said a shocked Jane.

"I thought it survived the attack," David mentioned looking around for remains.

"It is there, Mr. and Mrs. Granger," called a bodiless voice. Harry spun his wand around looking for the source and saw Griphook appear in front of them holding his hands out for all to see. "I have the list of wards and spells that need setting on the chosen person. Who will it be?"

"Me," Hermione said hesitantly while stepping forward.

"Who will be casting the spells?" Griphook queried.

"If you don't need any special training or experience," Harry said, "I will do it. Otherwise, Tonks or Remus should do it."

"You simply need to read what is on the parchment, Harry," Griphook smiled.

"If it is alright with you?" Harry asked the Grangers as one.

"That is fine, Harry," Hermione answered for the family.

Harry took the offered parchment and read the words while aiming his wand at Hermione. Smoky white, yellow, and light blue mist was emitted and encircled Hermione while Harry kept reading. As each sentence was completed, a mild burst of light would appear and fade into her. Everyone watched the process with eagerness and in the Grangers' case a moderate amount of fear.

When he finished, Harry lowered his wand and held the parchment out to Hermione. "You should keep this in case you want to learn about all the wards."

"Ms. Granger," Griphook interrupted. "You must read the bottom portion of the parchment to accept the knowledge you have been granted. On the back are the instructions for permitting others access to your home. The business has the same protections but only muggles can enter without being affected. An emergency portkey has been placed in your office at the business and it will bring you here. The item is described on the parchment."

Hermione read through the document, and her jaw dropped as each protection was listed. The complexities of the wards were staggering as she reviewed the number of them and their incantations. The list was longer than her longest essay for McGonagall. She found the part she had to read and did so. She glowed for a second before returning to normal. "Wow! That was, I don't know, amazing?"

"As it should be, Ms. Granger," another voice said. Harry saw Ragnok appear before him from out of no where.

"How many more people are going to appear?" Harry asked.

"There are no others" Ragnok answered. "Are there, Ms. Granger?"

"No, there aren't," Hermione said with a smile. "I can see the house and it looks fine. The new door is different but I like it." Both of her parents wore looks of doubt on their faces. "Oh, let me help you out."

Harry tried to stop her from using magic, but Ragnok interrupted him. "Ms. Granger can do magic outside of the wards if it is related to the wards. It is an old law that is a carry over thanks to the pureblooded families. As a special thanks to you, Harry, we added in a ward to block the Ministry under aged magic sensors."

Hermione jumped in place before she read off the document and waved her wand around each of her parents' heads in turn. After a couple minutes of recitation, both muggles looked surprised then relaxed.

"It is wonderful," Jane said.

"It is perfect," David added. "Amazing trick."

"I assure you that it is not a trick, Mr. Granger," Ragnok said. "What you saw or didn't see was the expert application of Gringotts warding skills. Harry tasked us to protect your home, so we did. Ms. Granger must permit every single visitor access to your house now. Without her granting access, no one will be able to see it. Now that myself and Griphook are beyond the ward line, we can not see the house any longer. The activation of all wards was accomplished when Harry read the document and granted Ms. Granger the knowledge."

"It is very technical and confusing if you do not have an intimate understanding of the processes at work," Griphook explained further. "Fortunately, I only had to supervise the project and not execute the warding."

"Now that our business has been concluded," Ragnok continued, "we will be leaving you to your very safe home. Harry, I have this information for you to do with as you please." Ragnok handed Harry a scroll that was sealed and tightly bound.

“Thank you,” a confused Harry said as he looked at the scroll before depositing it in his cloak. “And thank you for helping me out with this.”

“It was our pleasure, Harry,” Ragnok smirked. “Besides, you paid us quite well for our efforts here. Good evening to you all.”

Griphook pulled out a galleon and when both goblins touched it, they disappeared instantly. Harry looked around getting a bad feeling. “Perhaps those going inside the house should do so and those not should leave.”

Hearing the anxiousness in his voice, Hermione repeated the process she did for her parents to Harry, Tonks, and Remus. Seeing the house sitting safely in its lot, Harry urged everyone onto the lawn. “Right quick, please.”

Once they had crossed the boundary and reach the front step, Harry looked at the street and waited. Tonks and Remus joined him as the Grangers stood behind them wondering what was going on. Harry looked for the cause of the unsettling feelings he was getting. A bit a movement down the street caught his eye and drew his full attention as well as his wand.

A figure moved down the street hiding in the shadows cast by the street lights in combination with the old trees. Harry waited, ready with a spell, and watched the figure grow nearer to the home. When he was within thirty feet, Harry saw the glint of something silver sticking out of the man’s cloak.

“Wormtail,” Harry growled softly and started to move towards the person who betrayed everyone he could have betrayed just to save his own life. Tonks and Remus were the first to grab onto Harry and hold him back enough to give Hermione a chance to move in front of him.

“Harry,” Hermione pleaded. “I know you want to get him, but not now please.” Hermione pushed on Harry to back him into the house. The others followed her lead.

“I can catch him,” Harry growled keeping his eyes on the advancing traitor.

“He never travels alone, Harry,” Remus tried to reason. “Severus has said that at meetings. He doesn’t go anywhere alone.”

“He is alone right now,” Harry argued never removing his eyes from Wormtail. He fought against the group as they forced him closer to the open front door.

A sharp flash of pain struck Harry in the head dropping him to his knees and nearly upsetting the entire pile of people. Harry seethed against the pain and forced his magic and Occlumency to fight the crippling agony. His vision swam, but Wormtail was clear enough to be seen.

“Harry,” Hermione whispered into his ear pointing down the block. “Look.”

Harry gained some ground on the pain as Tonks rubbed his neck and back. He saw another figure that seemed to be floating down the street. It paid no heed to the light or darkness as he moved in and out of the shadows without hesitation.

“Wormtail,” hissed the voice of everyone’s nightmares. “I fail to see the mudblood’s house as you promised.”

Harry had stopped fighting the effort countering him once they stopped pushing him backwards. The entire group stood transfixed as they viewed the Dark Lord in person. Harry regained his footing and stood. In one fluid movement, he pulled Hermione and Tonks behind him. He took one step forward only to be pulled to a stop by Remus.

“The odds are not in our favour, Harry,” Remus spoke softly. “We would need Dumbledore here before we could try anything. Please, let it go this time. Think of us. You might survive the fight but we wouldn’t.”

Harry stilled in his resistance as the words registered in his mind. Horace’s constant barking about numbers and plans reminded him that his luck could run out at anytime, and his friends may not have enough to survive this time. He watched and waited as did everyone else.

“Masster,” stuttered Wormtail. “It was here, I swear. This is the street we attacked before. It has to be here.”

“You tipped our hand too early, Wormtail,” Voldemort hissed vilely. “I sense magic at work here. So much effort for a few worthless muggles. What a waste of good magic. If Dumbledore wishes to expend his energy to save these things, then who am I to lessen the number of them. We will add to his never-ending list. The old man will tire soon and then I shall be there to kill him. To squeeze the life from his failing body as those he tries to save watch their leader break. Oh the pleasure of that day will last me a lifetime.”

“Ye...yes, Master” Wormtail said trying to hide his failure behind his master’s words of expected victory.

“Your failure has cost me the opportunity to hurt, Potter,” Voldemort hissed. “Crucio!”

Wormtail writhed on the sidewalk as Voldemort tortured him. The failing screams and cries caused a smile to spread across the snake-like face of the Dark Lord. The curse was maintained as black cloaked people appeared with various sounds. They circled their leader as he punished one of their own. The cruelest man in the world released the spell and turned to his followers.

“Failure is an option that is no longer tolerated,” Voldemort spoke softly causing frissons of fear to run down the spines of those protected by the wards. “I will take great pleasure in slowly killing those who fail me further. We will increase our numbers this week to replace those no longer worthy enough to serve me. To make my point, Crucio.” At Voldemort’s command, Wormtail was struck by the Torture Curse again.

Harry could see enjoyment play across the face of his enemy. The screams faded quickly as Peter’s throat and voice gave out from the strain. The curse was held for minutes as the victim twisted upon himself. Harry could not find it in himself to feel pity for the person who sentenced his parents to their deaths, killed Cedric, or brought Voldemort back to life.

Ending the spell, Voldemort looked in the direction of the Grangers house. His eyes slid from one neighboring house to the other without pausing. "Impressive magic at work here. We have exposed ourselves enough for the evening. It has been enjoyable, but not as enjoyable as promised." Voldemort turned his gaze towards the broken man on the ground. "We begin our move next week. The magical world will fear me more than they ever have."

In a swirl of his cloak, Voldemort Apparated away, leaving his followers to follow his actions. Harry let out breath he had been holding in. "Wormtail is still there. We can get him if we are quick."

"No!" Tonks whispered holding Harry in place as movement appeared on the opposite side of the street. A cloaked figure advanced on Wormtail and came to a stop while standing above him.

"Pathetic effort, Pettigrew," said the man barely loud enough to hear.

"I...tried my...best, Severus," Wormtail whimpered.

Harry saw red as he nearly jumped out of the grasp of Remus and Tonks. "Let me get him, both of them." Tonks put her hand over his mouth to stop him from making any additional noise.

"Your constant failures are getting old," Snape sneered. "He will kill you next time."

"I brought him back to us," Wormtail argued weakly. "He knows I am a loyal follower."

"Loyalty only goes so far," Snape answered.

"You know all about that," Peter spoke from the ground as he tried moving his legs. "Don't you Severus?"

"My loyalty is not in question and neither is my ability to serve. You should remember that before talking about things you do not understand."

"You have failed him lately," Peter pointed out. "Our Lord will kill you too."

"You would do well to keep your mouth shut, Wormtail." Snape pulled out something and dropped it on Wormtail. They both disappeared as one and the street was as empty as it had been minutes earlier.

Harry stopped all resistance and let himself be moved into the house. Once inside, with the doors closed and the windows checked, everyone gathered in the living room to sort out what they had seen. Harry was the first to assimilate the information and spent the remaining time watching the others.

When everyone seemed finished, Harry spoke up. "Thank you for stopping me. I would have risked us all to get Wormtail. I am glad you were there to stop me. At least we seem to be safe here. If Voldemort can't find us or isn't even willing to try, that is a good thing."

"That is what he looks like?" Hermione asked and Tonks agreed by nodding her head.

"Yep," Harry answered offhandedly. "Kind of off isn't he. The missing nose and snake-like face kind of ruin the mystic doesn't it?"

"How could you stand up to that," Remus asked introspectively. "How could you fight that?"

"Easy," Harry said rubbing his scar which had calmed the second Voldemort left. "I have no choice in the matter. I stand up, I fight, or he will kill me anyway. At least by fighting, I have a chance to win. Running or hiding will only make my suffering last longer."

"What did he do to that man?" David asked hesitantly.

"That was the Cruciatus Curse," Remus explained. "It gets you a life sentence in Azkaban for using it on someone. It hurts a lot."

"You have had it used on you?" Jane asked appalled.

"I haven't, but I have heard about it," Remus said sadly.

"I have," Tonks answered. "Just once and it hurt more than I can explain."

"Harry has," a tearful Hermione said.

The Grangers gasped at the new bit of information they had learned about Harry. Everyone looked at Harry who sat peacefully on the couch between Tonks and Hermione. "It happens," Harry waved it off. "Been under it a couple times. It hurts, don't get me wrong, but it isn't fatal. Some sleep and a warm bath and you feel loads better."

"Master of understatement, isn't he?" Tonks quipped. "I think it is time to get home."

Harry received extra long hugs from Jane and Hermione, and handshakes from David as Harry, Tonks, and Remus prepared to leave. Harry created a portkey home and smiled at his best friend as they portkeyed away. Appearing at home about an hour and a half after they left, the three looked at each other.

"I owe Harry something," Tonks said coyly. "If you will excuse us, Remus?" The couple made their way up the stairs and into their room closing the door behind them. Tonks pulled Harry into the bathroom and started to draw a bath.

"What do you have in mind, Nymph?" Harry asked quietly.

"I plan to share that bath with you, Harry," Tonks smirked and twitched her eyebrows. "And you will enjoy it."

Clothes were removed and the bath was enjoyed as Tonks and Harry moved as one into it. They rubbed, kissed, and touched each other. Tonks took the controlling position and slid down onto Harry slowly but with determination. She moaned at first before changing to muffled screams as she worked her way towards pleasure. Harry followed closely behind letting his hands roam her soapy body.

They both let out loud, satisfying sounds as they fell into each other and slid deeper into the water leaving only their heads above the surface. Harry ran his hand over her submerged body and played with her breasts a little before kissing her passionately.

"Thank you for thinking for me today, Nymphadora. I could have gotten all of us killed if you hadn't stopped me."

“We are a team, Harry. I am there to help you when you need it or when you don’t know you need it. I will always be there if you let me.”

“Thank you. I mean it.” Harry and Tonks kissed each other softly and with as much emotion as they could. It was nearly ten o’clock before two wrinkled bodies crawled into bed and fell asleep in the other’s arms.

16. Enemies Of The State

Harry and Tonks arrived at the Ministry on Monday morning leaving Remus in the house alone with the elves. The last thing they saw before they left was an irritated Paul following the older man around the living room mumbling about banisters, bathrooms, stink bombs, and yard work. Remus wore a reminiscing smile on his face the whole time he putted from room to room.

They were greeted in the training room by the sight of Horace and Cal having a serious discussion with Marcus looking on. "I wonder what they are on about," Harry pondered as the pair walked closer. He couldn't hear a word of the conversation so he figured that some kind of Privacy spell was at work. As the meeting came to a close, they separated and Cal and Marcus moved towards the exit.

"Chamel," Marcus called, "could you join us? Horace wants a few words with Ceps before the day grows any older."

"Okay," Tonks replied. "I will tell them what we heard last night at Hermione's. Maybe we can stop whatever You-Know-Who has planned before it happens."

"You have seen him," Harry frowned. "You can call him by name. It really isn't that hard. Trust me."

"I am working up to it, Ceps," Tonks patted his arm. "I will get there some day."

Harry followed Horace over to the classroom area and took a seat in one of the seats that had appeared as they neared. Much to his surprise, Horace spun his seat around a few feet away from him and mimicked his posture. Harry watched and waited as Horace looked him over obviously in deep thought.

Breaking the silence, Horace spoke. "What have you learned in the last few weeks?"

Puzzled and thrown by the unexpected tone of the conversation, Harry hesitated before responding. "Personal vendettas could get me or my team killed. Jones hates me and wants my spot on Team

Three.” Harry waited to see how Horace responded to what had been said. Horace did nothing but sit patiently. “I have a lot left to learn.”

Clapping his hands together slowly, Horace smiled. “That is exactly what you should think at this point in your training. I am glad to see you are on schedule; I had my doubts. Jones has been an ass for years. His head is a little too big for his abilities and he needs to be careful. In opposition, your head is too small for your abilities. You are good enough to hold your own against ninety-nine percent of the Wizarding populous.

“Granted, you know less than fifty percent of the spells most people do, but you utilize your knowledge faster, more precisely, and with far more power than they do. Usually, someone with your skill would overreach and endanger everyone in the process completely stuffing everything up. You haven’t done that and that proves you are the type of person we want and need. I may have seemed like a bastard to you, but I have my reasons. The biggest one is keeping you humble while I teach you to be the best you can be.

“Jones is ruthless and determined,” Horace offered with a chuckle. “He is also the greatest prick you will meet here. That man could drive a bishop to kill in cold blood. He wants what he thinks he is entitled to and as it so happens that is Team Three. Thing is he couldn’t have taken over your team and been as effective in a year let alone in a month. His personality lacks that special quality and Marcus and I know that. The last I will say on that subject is this. Defend yourself, your team, and your position, as *their* leader, against any who challenge you regardless of where the threat comes from. I will support you because you have proven yourself worthy of that support.

“Now, you accepting the fact that you know very little is important. Your knowledge is limited by your experience with magic and for that matter life in general. You are very young and your training has been extremely miniscule. A few years of Hogwarts only gets a normal person to the point of not blowing off their own head while trying to walk down the street. Having lived with muggles and those particular ones, you are at an even greater disadvantage. You never had the chance to see how magical people live their lives and how magic fits

into it. My guess is that you tend to do most things the muggle way simply because you do not know another way to do it.”

Harry reflected on that statement and realized that it was completely true. Harry thought about how the Weasleys and Tonks did everyday things. Magic was used whenever it could be. Harry couldn't remember using magic just for the sake of using it. He would always do it the muggle way unless magic would really make a difference.

“Your silence tells me that I am correct,” Horace observed. “You may not have an encyclopedic list of spells, but the ones you do know are more effective than the average person. You can make the magic do what you want it to do with so little effort. You having the ability to perform magic wandlessly is an incredible gift. Given a few years of constant effort, you should be able to expand your list of wandless spells in much the same way others do with wandless ones. Do yourself a favour and practice that skill whenever you can.

“Vendettas,” Horace leaned back in his chair and folded his arms looking at Harry with a piercing stare. “Blind vendettas are dangerous. You will ignore common sense and good reason on the off chance of getting your revenge. We can not have that here. Too many lives depend on you and your head staying out of your arse. I hear that you only went after her when she was the only one left and you didn't risk the rest of your team to do so. Whether it was by plan or luck, I respect your decision that time.

“Things could have gone horribly wrong and I could be wiping your memory as we speak, but they didn't. As I have said, I respect results. The result was positive enough for me not to get all bent up over your actions. Gillian coming to me and defending you helps you out more than you can guess. I wasn't there so I have to trust her assessment of the situation. I will warn you that Thor may try to take you under his wing later on. You impressed him and frankly all of Team Two as well. Robeen has requested any joint missions involving his team be coupled with yours.

“Back patting aside, why in the bloody hell didn't you kill that bitch when you had the chance? You should have switched to Killing Curses the second one of those sods started using them. By orders,

we should have gotten zero prisoners out of that strike. Your first spell was blocked but you slipped in a second one fast enough so it didn't matter. You violated the mission orders in an attempt to avoid killing someone. Next time, you may not be so fortunate." Horace sighed. "Again, the results count for a lot more than the means that achieved them. Do not violate orders again. I will not be lenient next time."

"I will keep that in mind, Horace," Harry replied feeling relieved and guilty at the same time.

"Everything is a learning experience as long as you survive, Ceps," Horace told him. "The trick is to survive to learn the lesson. Do not take the same risk again. Things rarely work out so well from mission to mission. Second chances are rare even if you seem to be the exception."

There was a relaxed silence between them as Harry thought about the risks and chances he had taken. Images of different results swam around in his head. Every time he saw Tonks die, something inside of him tightened. An ache bored into his very being as he thought of all the ways she could have been killed because of his unwillingness to take a life. As the tension in the air grew, Harry felt his magic surge up. He was on edge and he needed to regain control quickly.

"Welcome to life, Ceps," Horace said breaking the stillness. "So many different outcomes from one little decision. What will really burn you up is the sheer, overwhelming number of things that can happen from the smallest of choices. Life is a series of interconnected options that we weave our way through until we die. Learn from past choices do not bemoan them."

Harry nodded his acceptance and understanding of what Horace had told him. The volume of things Harry worried about weighed his mind down so often. It was only this summer that he changed that pattern, and Tonks was the real reason for the change.

"You have earned my respect, Ceps," Horace said standing up and placing his arm on Harry's shoulder. "I think you understand what I have been trying to teach you. I think we can move beyond the

adversarial teacher/student phase and try the companion phase, don't you?"

"That would be a welcomed change."

"I will be honest," Horace said leaning in a little. "You respond so well to confrontation. I could see your potential and it was intoxicating. That is my reasoning for using it for so long. Well, actually it wasn't that long compared to others, but it was far more intense for you."

Harry balked at his comment earning himself a smirk from Horace. "It was effective and I stand by it, Ceps. You have such a need to prove yourself to others that I couldn't help myself. I truly enjoyed teaching you that way. The only downfall is that the technique can create resentment that can really change people. You were showing signs of that change beginning to take place and I had to stop. Don't think I will hold your hand and give you hugs, but I am not going to beat you down as much as before. I tested your limits and I am pleased with what I learned about you. I hope you learned something about yourself too."

Harry merely nodded his understanding before taking a deep breath and letting it out. "Thanks. I was getting tired of never doing anything right."

Horace smirked. "What makes you think you did anything right?" Horace got an evil glimmer in his eyes that caused Harry to rethink the benefit of this change in their interaction. "Come on, next time I want you to kill that woman when you see her and sitting about over here isn't going to get us there any faster."

Tonks returned to find Harry and Horace working on spells and the tactics to use them to their fullest. As she watched, she saw some she knew and some that she didn't. When Cal joined them, the team worked together on learning as much as they could from Horace. Both noticed the dramatic change in teaching style and welcomed the more relaxed tone.

Tuesday was filled with more team instruction lessons from Horace. Harry learned a lot and only saw the rough side of Horace when he failed at getting something after a few tries. A happy medium was

worked out among the group that seemed to get the best results out of every one.

That night Harry looked at the scroll he had received from Ragnok. The contents confused him at first, but after some reading and comparison he figured it out. "Nymph, is this what I think it is?"

"I have no idea," Tonks said playfully as she ran her hand down his leg as they sat on the couch together. Remus had looked up from his book which was one he had found in the library.

"It looks like a list of companies that I have a stake in. What stands out in my mind is the second list that shows other major shareholders in those companies. I recognize some of those names and it isn't because I like them."

"What are the names?" Remus asked since Tonks seemed more interested in looking at or playing with Harry at the moment. Her hands had just reached his hair and began mussing it up.

"Carrows, Crouch, Malfoy, and Rockwood are just a few that jump out at me," Harry answered. "Most of these companies came from the Black estate and not the Potter's. Why would he give this to me?"

"Did you read all of the pages?" Tonks asked him with a soft coo to her voice.

"Not yet," Harry said as he flipped through the pages. He passed more lists of companies and shareholders. He found a letter at the end and read it. A smile grew on his face as he read. "Oh that sneaky goblin. They are as bad as everyone thinks they are." He kept reading and when he finished Harry smiled a smile that could scare Hermione.

"What is it?" Tonks asked returning to play with Harry's hair after she had moved on to his ears.

"There is an old law that was put into place when the Minister at the time wanted to increase his holding in certain companies. The thing was, his biggest rival owned a controlling share in many of them and wouldn't allow the sale to take place. The Minister passed a law that

allowed the Ministry to remove control of shares if the person was deemed an enemy of the state. Now, it wasn't that simple since the person had to go through a hearing, be judged, and found guilty of being an enemy of the state before the court.

"Long story short, the Minister lost his bid to destroy his rival. The rival, in turn, ousted the Minister and leveled charges of abuse of office and so on. Thing is, the law is still on the books but it hasn't been used since. I guess they forgot about it since it didn't work. If I understand this correctly, as long as the Ministry declares the Death Eaters as enemies I can buy them out of these companies."

"Wouldn't that give them all the money then?" Tonks asked giving Harry a soft kiss on the lips.

"It would," Remus said remembering back to what happened the first time around. "But if I remember the first war correctly, the Ministry froze or took away money from convicted criminals as punishment. Even if that didn't happen, the money itself would generate less money than it would as stocks. So the worse that would happen would be a short term cash infusion for the family of a Death Eater. Oh, that is sneaky. Good thing I am not an enemy of Ragnok's."

"You can see why he runs Gringotts can't you?" Tonks asked aloud before focusing back on Harry with an intensity that had Remus looking away now and then.

"Nymph," Harry said quietly. "I think we are bothering Remus a little with our friendliness. Perhaps we should wait until later."

Tonks looked to Remus and smirked before sighing and putting on a perfect child-like pout. A minute passed before she looked at the clock. "It is later now." Tonks happily slipped out of Harry's lap and stood up pulling him to his feet. "Have a good night, Remus." Tonks directed Harry up the stairs and into their room. She pushed him onto the bed and cast the proper spells on the room before crawling up Harry's body with slow and deliberate movements.

"Nymphadora," Harry queried softly fighting his desire to ravage her.

“Hush, Harry,” Tonks told him and placed her finger on his lips following up with her own mouth. She proceeded to kiss him starting off soft and warm before moving on to hard and eager. She tossed her clothes off when she had the chance, and Harry followed her lead. Ten minutes after entering the room both had removed all traces of clothing and settled into a slow and passionate rhythm.

Between breaths and sounds, Harry asked Tonks what brought all of it on. After a rather loud moan, Tonks opened her eyes and stared into his trying to see deep into his soul. “You jumped in front of that Cruciatus Curse for me today. How can I not do this for you? No one has ever taken a curse anywhere close to the level of that one for me. You didn’t even think about did you?”

“Not a chance of that,” Harry smirked driving deeper into her shuddering slightly from the effort. “I figure that was explained well enough for all in the room at the time.”

Tonks looked at Harry with shining eyes before pulling him to her. She gave him a wet and hungry kiss before wrapping her legs around him, pulling down, and flipping him onto his back. Taking on the control position, Tonks forced herself down onto Harry with long, determined motions. “Thank you for doing that. You never stop showing how much you care about others. You are a one-of-a-kind, Harry Potter.”

As she continued with her actions, Harry felt the building urge in him. “Nymph,” Harry called out with a stuttering voice. Tonks ignored him and drove on harder and faster. Harry bunched up his hands fisting up the sheets in the process as he focused on maintaining control. Sensing him fighting against her goal, Tonks shifted her leg a little so she could add a slight twist at the end of her motions.

She was rewarded with a growl and both of Harry’s hands flying to her breasts giving them a squeeze before settling on her hips. Without thought, Harry aided her thrusts by pulling her down and rotating her as well. In a short time, Harry lost control completely and was reduced to shuddering mass quivering under Tonks driven body.

After spending all he had, Harry put up a feeble effort in trying to stop Tonks from continuing. Feeling her need growing even more, Tonks

fought off his quelling hands and kept stride to reach her climax. As he moaned but responded anyway, Harry gave up all attempts to stop her. He was completely enthralled in her and wanted her to be happy even if he lost his mind because of it.

As she shuddered and gripped his shoulders tightly in an effort to keep from falling off, Tonks screamed out. It was the kind of growling scream that came from deep inside. She fought through the urge to collapse on Harry and kept moving. Every nerve ending sparked, and her sense of touch was so acute she thought she was going to pass out from an overload. Harry growled in time with her and managed to meet her downward thrust with a couple of his own upward ones.

As their energy failed about the same time, Tonks collapsed onto Harry's chest and slipped to the side. She curled into him as her breathing and heartbeat raced on. She sighed and mumbled something into his chest.

"What was that, Nymph?" Harry asked as he slipped into a peaceful and satisfied sleep.

Wednesday had more training and team building exercises. Horace pushed on but left out threatening Chamel with the Cruciatus Curse. The day before when Harry jumped in front of her and took the spell instead, Horace ended it a few seconds later to find a very angry Harry staring him down. Horace went home that night thinking of those eyes and that stare wondering if he would survive their next encounter.

Harry had relaxed, but there was an air of danger for the first few hours of training. Horace knew that if he repeated the events of Tuesday, Harry would prove that he could take a life by ending his.

During the lunch break, Harry and Tonks Apparated out of the Ministry only to return by way of the phone booth. As Harry traversed the Atrium, he remembered breakfast that morning and the request of a meeting he sent to Minister Bones via Hedwig. The response had been intercepted by the Unspeakables and rerouted to Harry at the Ministry.

Reaching the guard station, Harry returned to the matter at hand. "Present your wand for testing," the guard repeated as he had recited many times before.

Harry drew it instantly and offered it to the guard. The speed of his draw got a rise out of the guard and almost pushed him to the point of hitting the alarm. Only Tonks telling the guard to hurry up prevented a mess from occurring. Once his wand had been weighed, documented, and returned, Harry led Tonks to the proper lift and pressed the appropriate button for their floor.

As the lift took them to their destination, Harry smiled as he rethought his plan. "Looking forward to something, Harry?" Tonks asked with a slightly cheeky tone.

Smirking eagerly, Harry replied. "Only if it is a repeat of last night." Harry relished the shiver of pleasure that shot through him as the memories swam to the front of his mind. Tonks looked to be doing the same thing as she closed her eyes and ran her hand down her front slowly.

"Maybe we can work something out for later this week, Harry," Tonks answered softly. "I am not sure my body could take the punishment again so soon. I loved every minute of it, but I am still sore. I don't know what you did but..." Tonks was cut off as the doors opened with a clatter.

They exited the lift and headed for the Minister's office. The hallway was lined with rich wood and plush carpet. Glittering gold accented anything that could be accented and paintings of previous Ministers lined the walls. Some openly watched Harry walk down the hallway towards the gilded double doors at the end while others were more discrete about it. The simple fact of the matter was that every painting followed Harry in one fashion or another.

Opening the doors, Harry entered the reception and waiting area where the same wood and carpeting décor continued unhindered. A heavy desk with a modest amount of decoration sat in the center of the room with another set of doors behind it and to the side. Harry saw the same woman behind the desk as when Madam Bones' office was in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. A few very soft

chairs sat against a far wall around a small table that had various publications piled about it. Harry couldn't help but catch the image of him smiling from underneath one of the circulars.

Harry walked up to the woman giving his name and reason for his visit. She checked the schedule and told him that he was early and to have a seat for a few minutes. Harry saw her eye Tonks in a way that was far from subtle. The pair moved the chairs and sat down. Harry couldn't help but move aside the other circulars to find the one with him on the cover. He was shocked when he found it.

Witch Weekly had a cover story about him and the fact he was sixteen and mind-blowingly wealthy. The article had the headline, "*Most Eligible Minor.*" Harry snorted and tossed it back onto the pile. He scowled when Tonks reached out, grabbed the magazine, and pulled it into her lap before flipping it open. She scoured the pages until she found the one about Harry. She settled in and began reading completely ignoring Harry's disapproving grimace.

"Did you know that you have been to Africa this summer and dated more than ten girls while you were there? You cad, you are the father of three children there too. My, you have been busy. Where do you find the time?" Tonks laughed playfully as she continued to comment about the article.

Normally, Harry would have been angered by the lies that had been printed about him, but Tonks' laughter told him that it didn't really matter. The claims were so ludicrous that he found himself laughing with her.

"You stopped over in the colonies to shag a few witches before coming back home to your mansion and the harem of five women you currently shack with. Should I go looking for these women or are going to bring them around some time?" Tonks batted her eyelashes at him a few times before reading on.

Whispering, Harry said, "I think the one woman I have is enough for me right now. Granted, waiting a day or two might be too long, but I am willing to give her a chance."

"Git," Tonks muttered under breath while wearing a coy smile. "You are currently testing out of half of your classes so you can lessen your class load to work on becoming the next Wizarding playboy. Oh my, when were you going to tell me? It says in here that with Gilderoy Lockhart having an extended stay in St. Mungo's, you are his most logical replacement. My you are a busy one aren't you?"

Beginning to find the absurdity as amusing as Tonks, Harry couldn't help but play along. "Now and then I barely find the time to sleep what with running around and..." Harry leaned over to read a paragraph or two. "...shagging up to three different women a night. Bloody hell I am busy." He smirked at her and laughed before settling back into his seat.

"It may be funny, but the thing is you could probably manage this if you wanted to," Tonks pointed out hoping to hear the right answer.

"Please," Harry waved off her comment. "I am lucky not to stuff up what I have right now. Merlin knows that depends more on her than me. I am hopeless when you get right down to it."

"You keep thinking that way and you will have no problems, Harry. I will put in a good word for you." Tonks rejoiced inside and resumed reading. Finishing up the article, she closed it and dumped it back on the table.

"What else have I gotten up to? Harry asked.

"Well, you are being trained by the Ministry's best in politics and leadership. You slay dragons on your off time when you aren't doing your civic duty or shagging any woman that moves," Tonks offered while tapping her bottom lip with her finger and thinking. "Oh, and you have your secret team of fashion experts designing next year's line of clothing that you are going to model yourself."

"Really?" Harry asked trying to avoid the Ministry part. "I guess I need to meet with them and coordinate a time for the fashion show before my schedule fills up. Maybe I should spend more time relaxing and enjoying life."

“You could, but that wouldn’t fit with your persona, Harry. You have to be bigger than life and more public than they make you out to be. It is the only way to be the next playboy of the Wizarding world.”

“I will just have to wing it then,” Harry said as the other set of doors in the room opened of their own accord. “I never was much one for planning.”

“The Minister will see you now,” announced the woman as she followed Tonks with her eyes as they entered the Minister’s office.

“Mr. Potter,” Amelia said. “It is a pleasure to see you again. I still have not made a decision whether or not I hate you for this.”

“It is Harry, Minister,” Harry corrected with a smile. “If you end up hating me, please just send notice. I will need to add you to the list. I am planning on having a party for the members before the end of summer.”

“I am so glad you are in high spirits, Harry,” Amelia added. “Call me Amelia when we are among friends. Auror Tonks, are you enjoying your time with Harry this summer?”

Tonks couldn’t help but smile widely at the comment. “I am having a great time, Minister.”

Amelia eyed the woman carefully. “I think I should leave that one alone. I might not like what I would find if I looked into it. Enough of the small talk, Harry, what did you wish to discuss with me?”

“As always, I enjoy your directness, Amelia,” Harry rubbed his hands together. “Are the Death Eaters and Voldemort, for that matter, enemies of the state?”

Amelia fought her shudder at the easy mention of the Dark Lord’s name. “You say that name so easily, Harry, it is rather shocking. Sorry, your answer is yes. They are enemies of the Wizarding world and therefore the Ministry or the state as you put it. Why?”

“If you declare them enemies of the state,” Harry began, “then their financial holdings can be bought out from under them against their

wishes. I have a list of the known Death Eaters and a partial list of their holdings. The list only shows the companies that I have more than a passing interest in. Many are from the Black Estate which explains why so many Death Eaters invested in those companies. The Blacks were sympathetic to Voldemort's cause and most likely offered financial assistance to his followers.

"If you declare them enemies of the state, I can buy their shares and remove a large source of their income and ultimately Voldemort's. It will be pretty simple to accomplish what with Fudge out of the way and not protecting them any longer. I only need you to make the declaration. We can handle the rest."

"Who gave you this information and who is 'we'?" Amelia asked knowing it was not some half-arsed plan concocted by a well-intentioned do-gooder with no means to carry it out.

"They are one and of the same," Harry toyed. "I have a financial advisor that has been doing well for me. He found a few things to assist me in my life."

"Have any of those been financial?" Amelia said looking suspicious.

Harry thought about it for a second. "Up until now, no. This will be the first financial thing he has done for me as long as you look at it as getting new money."

"Your fingers are deep into Gringotts aren't they, Harry?" Amelia asked smiling.

"I have no idea what you mean," Harry retorted looking guilty.

"Director Ragnok does not help humans like this just because they have money," Amelia pointed out.

"Ragnok has made a decision about some things and it seems that I am involved in that decision," Harry offered.

"The fact that you called him by his name tells me you are more than client and advisor. Am I correct, Auror Tonks?" Amelia queried.

Tonks looked to Harry before answering. He nodded with a little thought. "You have always had excellent instincts, Minister."

"And if Harry had not agreed to you answering my question?"

"I wouldn't have answered it, Minister," Tonks replied without hesitation. "Like Director Ragnok, I know whose side I am going to be on regardless of what happens."

Amelia looked Harry over and thought back to the recall hearing. One consistent feeling dominated all of her interactions with Harry in the past month, determination. She knew Harry was determined to survive, but his dealings with the Ministry as of late involved more than survival. "I would like to ask a personal question if you will humour me." At his nod, she asked it. "Who has won an argument with you lately?"

Tonks broke into laughter as Harry scowled trying to fight off the smile. "Her." Harry offered pointing his thumb in Tonks' direction. "The house elves, they are wickedly stubborn."

Amelia smiled but was surprised to hear Tonks add another to the list. "Jules, don't forget Jules."

"Leave it to you to bring her up," Harry joked. "If you would just be nice things would get along smoothly."

"I have nothing to do with it, Harry," Tonks argued. "It isn't like she listens or anything. She even ignores you. How can I win her over when you can't get her to listen to reason?"

Harry held up his hands in defeat and sighed before looking at Amelia. "I definitely want to leave that one alone," Amelia said looking between the pair. "So if I name them as enemies of the state, you will buy their shares in various companies?"

"That is the plan right now," Harry told her. "If the Ministry can freeze that money, take it, or at least watch it, everything will work out fine. I am prepared to move fast on this."

“You know that it will take a meeting of the Wizengamot to enact it,” Amelia asked receiving a shrug in response. “It could go either way and if it fails you will be tipping your hand.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Harry said. “Not trying would be the biggest mistake. It would also give you a chance to see who is on their side. Any member who refuses to support it will look involved with them. Politically, they have to support it or risk the public seeing them in a rather nasty light. The only real risk is doing nothing. There is only an upside here.”

“Unless the companies tank and you lose a lot of your money,” Amelia pointed out. “It could cost millions.”

“I have millions and I don’t care,” Harry waved off her concerns. “It is only money. If I can hurt them, it is worth every knut.”

“Remind me never to gamble with you, Harry,” Amelia shook her head. “I will call a session for tomorrow. If it passes, you will have to act fast to secure the plan or other unknown Death Eaters could do the same thing.”

“I will notify my supporter to be ready,” Harry replied while standing up. “Thank you so much for your time, Minister. I really do enjoy speaking with you more than your predecessor. He was hopeless.”

“I feel the same way, Mr. Potter.” Amelia walked them to the door and told her assistant to notify the Wizengamot of the next day’s emergency meeting.

Harry and Tonks left the office and returned to the lift. They exited the Ministry and Apparated back just in time for more training at the hands of Horace. The pair fought hard and managed to learn a few things while avoiding the worst of it.

They arrived home weary and tired to find Remus sitting on the couch laughing to himself. Harry thought he had finally cracked and gave Tonks a worried look. “I think he has gone round the twist for the last time.”

"I am perfectly sane, Harry," Remus said fighting the last of his laughs. "Been like that for about an hour. Paul brought up something I had long forgotten. We were all here one summer day back before our seventh year. Your father was complaining about your mother not noticing him and such driving Sirius and I completely up the wall. It was going on week two or three and we had had enough.

"Being the evil genius when it came to ideas, Sirius thought about altering your father into something that was sure to get her attention. Now, Sirius was full of ideas, but couldn't carry them out if he had to. He didn't have the gift of planning or spell writing to make it happen. That is where I came in.

"I was always the planner and spell writer at least until Lily came into the group. She was gifted with spell creation and not the silly ones we worked on but real spells that mattered. Anyway, we researched the spells that did each of the parts we wanted. Sirius end up complaining about that so both of them were whining about different things and driving me mad in the process." Remus paused to take in the wonderful memories before continuing.

"Once we had the components, I began the week long process to put them together into a pair of spells. Sirius wanted it in one spell, but the complexities were staggering. Once I had the pair of incantations finished, I gave it to Sirius and he lied in wait. Your father had calmed down about Lily as we worked on humiliating him so the timing was all off.

"Sirius was getting more impatient by the day and nearly used the spell on Paul because he yelled at us one day for something we *didn't* do. Fortunately, Sirius maintained control and the moment arrived. Sirius baited your father and got him going again. I had managed to get a camera ready in case it worked. As James began listing off what he had to offer her, Sirius struck. I had thought a muggle motif was in order as she grew up as one and lived with them during the summers.

"The spell turned your father into a clown and a mighty odd one at that. His hair resisted the funny parting style we had wanted and simply changed colours and stuck up all over the place like normal.

His nose did expand, but Sirius stuffed up that part of the incantation so it grew to twice its normal size. His ears folded forward for some unknown reason that we never figured out and his eyebrows disappeared.”

Harry laughed at the picture in his head and Tonks chuckled as she tried to imagine the scene as it happened. Remus continued, “His body puffed out making him look rather roly-poly. His feet doubled in size as did his hands. The best part was the make up. His skin bleached out as if he was a vampire. He had bright red circles on his cheeks and his nose turned green. He was forced to smile at all times and his teeth grew turning bright yellow.

“Sirius busted out laughing after a second of shock, but I was dumbfounded for a good minute. By the time I came back to reality, James had been chasing after Sirius and they were on their second circuit of the downstairs. As graceful as he usually was, James could barely run with feet that big. He fell down every time he tried so he had to jump. Sirius called him the Amazing Kangaroo Clown which only made James want to hurt him more so.

“I finally gathered up enough of my wits to start up the camera and take snapshots of James and his stylish new look. Sadly for us, your father reached his humour limit for the day and drew his wand. Sirius never knew what hit him before he was laid out on the stairs while trying to get away. I, on the other hand, saw it coming. James was a formidable person when it came to spells so I thought fast. I blamed everything on Sirius; it was all I could think of at the time.

“James was a smart man and knew Sirius couldn’t work it out himself to save his life. So James knew that I had helped far more than I had let on. The only evidence that survived was one picture I managed to pocket before James Stunned me and destroyed the camera and pictures. I think he would have Obliviated us if he had known the spell or even heard of how to do it.”

“What happened to the picture?” Harry asked as he propped Tonks up with his shoulder as she laughed uncontrollably.

“Of course we couldn’t let it rest,” Remus answered. “On the train ride to Hogwarts, Sirius and I left James and *him* in the carriage and

sought out Lily. When we found her, Sirius bowed to her and handed her the wrapped picture. She knew better than to accept anything from him without being cautious first. She did a Revealing Charm and a few others before feeling safe enough to open it. It was a good ten minutes before we could leave her carriage. Shortly after the first few nights back, they were together and that was that.

“I can’t say that picture caused it or helped it, but I would like to think that James Potter looking like he did helped soften his appearance to her. It was rumored that on their honeymoon she brought it along and asked him to re-enact it for her. The only fact I know is that Sirius and I received an express owl the next day threatening our lives when he returned.”

With tears in his eyes, Harry held Tonks close to him. He loved hearing stories about his parents and the only thing he could do to keep from crying was to hold Tonks tightly and keep laughing. Tonks felt more than knew what Harry was doing and melted into him.

Remus waited for right before they went to bed to tell them that he had to leave the next morning. Harry asked why and Remus told him it was the full moon. No amount of reasoning or options would change Remus’ mind on the matter. He felt he had to be as far away from people as he could be during those times.

With Tonks’ help, Harry accepted Remus’ decision on the condition that they get together before Harry returned to Hogwarts. Remus accepted the terms and bade them goodnight.

Thursday began with Harry and Tonks walking Remus outside of the wards. Once the door opened, Harry had to run interference for the others by repeatedly blocking the path Jules had chosen to confront Tonks and more importantly Remus. At one point, Harry grabbed Jules’ head and held it in front of his own. Tonks thought Jules was going to snap Harry in half, but she relented under his firm grasp.

Once they left the property, Harry released Jules and patted her on the head thanking her for cooperating. He joined the others and hugged Remus goodbye. The older man held him a few seconds longer before holding him at arms’ length.

"You are a wonderful man, Harry," Remus told him. "Both of your parents would be immensely proud of you. Know that no matter what happens. They would be so very proud of you. Thank you for giving an old wolf a chance to remember the good times and create new ones. Take care of him, Tonks, even if he won't let you."

"You sound like I am never going to see you again, Moony," Harry pointed out warily.

"As I learned the first time around, Harry," Remus wavered, "you do not know what tomorrow will bring. Whatever you do during the day, I know it isn't safe. Both of you need to stay safe if not for yourselves, then for each other. You are good together and make each other happy. That is a rare find."

Harry smiled and stepped back wrapping his arm around Tonks and pulling her close. "I will see you later?"

"Yes," Remus stated firmly before Apparating away.

They returned to the house, got ready, and went to the Ministry. They were met with an empty training room so they waited. After a few minutes, Horace opened the door and waved them over. The pair followed him to the briefing room and found Team Two and Five waiting around the table. Harry was able to pick out the shape of Jones sitting between Michael and Taruse.

They took seats with Cal and watched Marcus stand up with his hands clasped together. "Today we are moving some of the prisoners to Azkaban. The three captured recently are remaining here for interrogation, but the others will be transferred. I understand it has been some time since we have done such a large transfer so I will refresh your memories on the procedures. We are assigning two prisoners to each team. You are responsible for them getting to the prison in one piece one way or another. If they resist, Stun them. If they escape, kill them."

Horace stepped away from the wall and continued. "Do to the wards, we have to portkey to the outer boundary of the prison. Then we have a few hundred yards to travel to reach the boats that will ferry us to the prison. From there, we have to move them to the prison intake

room just inside the entrance at which point we leave the same way. Any use of magic inside the boundary triggers an alarm and a lockdown of the prison. If we cause a lockdown, we will be up to our necks in aurors looking for a fight or so the brochures say.”

“Assemble in the training room while Team Two brings out the prisoners,” Marcus ordered. “They will be kept unconscious until we arrive at our destination. Ennervate them once we have regrouped. We move as teams and stay together. If there are any problems, yell out. Everyone will hold on to their prisoners while the team having the problem resolves it one way or another. Use of magic will be the last recourse. Questions?”

No one asked a thing so they made their way back to the training room. A few minutes later, Team Two brought in a pair of Death Eaters wearing a simple black cloak and cloth boots. The men were Levitated into the room and dropped in front of Team Five. Harry watched as Jones took the opportunity to kick one of them sharply before the team circled the pair lying on the floor.

A few minutes later, Team Two returned with two more cloaked people. They were set on the floor at Harry’s feet, and his team circled around them drawing their wands. Harry looked at one and recognized him as someone he had captured a few weeks prior. The second person was a woman that Harry didn’t know and hadn’t seen before. Cal volunteered to handle the man letting Harry take the woman. Tonks told them that she would cover both of them.

When the last group of two arrived, Horace handed out portkeys. “We will leave in one minute. Everyone touch the portkey and grab on to your prisoner. Remember the plan and avoid magic unless you have no other option.”

Harry and his team grabbed on to their people and the portkey waiting for it to activate. As the seconds passed, Harry took a deep breath and calmed his mind as much as he could. He knew that at least a few Dementors were going to be at the prison. Not every vial creature had abandoned the Ministry and joined Voldemort. Some remained at the prison since they were guaranteed victims to feed on.

When Harry felt the pull on his naval, he let his mind slip into a state of numbness preparing for the worst. They arrived as a large group in a clearing. He saw the old and weathered trees covered in moss and the air was heavy with cold moisture. Following the lead of the other groups, Harry Ennervated his woman and pulled her onto her wobbly feet. She gasped when she looked around and saw the other grey cloaks muscling fellow Death Eaters forward onto a hidden path in the tall grass.

She frantically spun her head around and figured out what was going to happen to her. "Please," she begged. "Let me go. I will do anything. Anything you want. You can beat me, fuck me, whatever your heart desires. Please let me go. I will be your slave if you want." The woman had turned and moved close to Harry. Her hands were still bound behind her back with bindings tight enough to limit the flow of blood making her hands very pale.

Harry couldn't help but be disgusted by the repeated offers. He gripped her arm tighter and pushed her forward. "Be quiet and move!" Harry snapped ignoring her pleas. He followed the others as they wound their way in and out of the trees. When they came to a ridge, Harry saw Horace standing off the path watching the teams move past.

When he drew even with Horace, Harry heard him say they were inside the wards. The path carried them down a short hill and a small cove could be seen in the distance. When one of the prisoners saw the boats, he balked and tried to move backwards. Jones rewarded the resistance with an elbow to the base of his skull. The man stumbled and was dragged by Jones and Taruse the remaining way. Team Five's second captive merely slumped his shoulders and shuffled on without fighting.

Team Two was in the middle of the column and had the largest of those being transferred. When they were about half way to the boats, the two Death Eaters broke free of their handlers and ran in opposite directions. The smaller of the pair was too slow to get away from Joslin and Robeen who knocked him down into a puddle of muck. The second man was large but quick. He dodged out of Thor's reach and ran flat out towards the trees.

When Thor chased after him, Cal ordered his prisoner to his knees and Harry forced him to do the same as he watched Thor chase after the fleeing man. When they passed a small pile of rocks, Thor reached down and picked one up losing only a step or two. With a throw any Chaser would be proud of, Thor launched the rock at the head of the escaping man. With dull thud, the rock connected with the man's head and he tumbled forward onto his face. The black cloak tore as the limp body skidded in the soft earth and rolled into a pile stopping against the base of a tree.

Thor ran up and placed his hand on the man holding him down while he caught his breath. After a few second, Thor checked the man for signs of life before picking him up and tossing him over his shoulder. He joined the group without saying a word. Once the other Death Eaters had seen what would happen if they tried to run, all of them did as they were ordered with little comment or resistance.

Getting into the boats, the group set off on a prearranged course. The water was choppy and a light drizzle started making everyone that much colder and wetter. Harry felt the boat rise and fall as they traversed the rough seas heading away from the shore. The woman had started crying once the boat launched and it was annoying Harry to no end. Thoughts of her torturing and killing people for the hope of power made him ill.

"Shut up," Harry spoke softly but with an edge to his voice. "You earned this the minute you took Voldemort's brand." The woman inhaled sharply at the mention of his name. "With any luck, that bastard will be joining you soon."

"You have no idea how much power he has," the woman muttered as her gaze drifted to the bottom of the boat.

"I think I have a better idea than you do," Harry countered. The woman started whimpering as they drew nearer to the unseen island. Even though the fog had gotten heavier, Harry felt the island in the distance. The overpowering cold and evil permeated the very air cycling through his lungs. The cold caused him to shiver once as he longed to reactivate the temperature control feature of his cloak.

As they broke through a bank of thick fog, a dark looming shape began to appear. A towering structure as blocky as any government housing in the muggle world disrupted the grey hazy view. The waves crashed onto the sharp and jagged rocks surrounding the most feared prison in the entire magical world. A rickety dock jutted out far enough for a few boats to dock at once meaning that they would have to dock in shifts.

Team Five and Horace docked first leaving Harry's team and Team Two to queue up. As the boats emptied, they took off around the island and disappeared out of sight around a large boulder. The next two boats came to a stop on either side of the dock allowing the passengers to disembark. Harry had to drag his sobbing woman out of the boat and practically carry her off of the dock before she had finally quieted and managed to walk on her own.

Harry looked up the twisting path that ascended at least thirty feet to the only visible opening in the structure; a large black door with mighty black hinges. The jagged rocks presented an imposing greeting to all who arrived. As Harry directed the woman along the path, he felt the Dementors on the island. It felt like a cold, dead hand reached into his chest and was trying to squeeze his heart until it stopped. A faint scream started in the back of his head and began the long journey forward growing in volume the whole way.

Vague images of green light and the feeling of death materialized against Harry's wishes. He knew it was the effect of the Dementors and he had to stop it quickly before it got out of control. Focusing on Occlumency and the more recent nights with Tonks, Harry used his mind to fight off the soul-draining efforts of the creatures behind the walls of the prison.

Harry wasn't the only one suffering from the close proximity with the guards of Azkaban. Tonks had fallen back and drifted closer to Harry as they walked. A couple of the captives had developed bad cases of the shakes, and the woman Harry was urging on had nearly stopped altogether. "Move along," Harry told her firmly. "You aren't the only one suffering."

Harry placed his free hand in the small of Tonks' back and rubbed it willing her encouragement. The group reached the door and Horace rapped on it a few times. No sound was heard inside, but the door opened a few minutes later. It opened slowly and silently revealing a dark empty room inside.

Harry felt the despair wash over him when he guided his prisoner inside and deposited her. He left as quickly as he could so the next Unspeakable could deliver their ward. Once he was outside, he moved next to Tonks, and they leaned against one another. After the last person was put into the room, the door closed quickly and with a resoundingly solid noise that made everyone jump because it was in such sharp contrast to the silence of the rest of the process.

As one, the group turned to leave the desolate island. They made quick work of the path back to the boats waiting to return them to the mainland. The return trip was twice as fast as the arriving one. Harry didn't bother to watch the prison disappear behind him as he held onto Tonks both to support her and him self. They shared a skip with Team Two but no one talked. Even the second boat was silent.

They reached the far shore and hurried on to land. Once the boats were empty they returned to the island empty. The group followed the faint trail back to the starting point and away from the wards. Once they crossed the line, Horace told them they were free for the day and to eat as much chocolate as they could tolerate. Harry and Tonks Apparated home and found an advanced copy of the Daily Prophet waiting on the table.

It had been sent by Amelia prior to the official publication along with a note.

Harry,

Here is tomorrow's paper. The Wizengamot was hesitant to pass this order, but I was able to talk them into it. Dumbledore seemed more thoughtful than normal as he voted in favour of it. Those who refused to vote or voted against it are named in the paper. I hope you are ready to act on your plan, because it is going to happen tomorrow.

Amelia

Harry smiled and grabbed a sheet of parchment from the table. "It looks like Amelia was able to get the other stuffy people to declare our *'friends'* enemies of the state. I hope Ragnok and Griphook are ready."

"We will find out tomorrow won't we?" Tonks asked as she nibbled on a bar of chocolate while sitting across from Harry. She had a faraway look about her and it worried Harry.

"Doing okay, Nymph?" Harry asked. The only response he got was a weak smile from the normally playful metamorph. He finished the letter and sent it away with Hedwig after giving her a demanded amount of attention first. "Come on, Nymph, I think you need to rest."

Tonks looked into Harry's eyes and saw the same drawn appearance she was sure she was wearing. "I think we both need rest."

They climbed the stairs hand in hand and went into their room. Harry closed the door and joined Tonks under the covers. The cloudiness outside did little to lift their spirits after such a wearing day in the middle of the darkest and coldest place in all of Britain. As they cuddled together, Harry felt a little warmth re-enter his body. It started where his hand rested on Tonks arm. It slowly spread chasing away the feelings of despair.

"Twelve years of that and he kept his sense of humour," Tonks whispered.

Harry felt his heart lurch in his chest as Tonks voiced his own thoughts aloud. "It takes quite a man to do that. He was special."

Tonks sighed before curling into Harry and capturing his eyes. "You are special too, Harry. You must know that."

"I am beginning to understand it," Harry answered softly looking at her moist lips. He ran his hand down her side pulling her to him bit by bit.

"Touch me," Tonks whispered. "Show me that you understand."

Harry kissed her warmly and felt the sensation race through him chasing the gloom away. He kept running his hand around her body moving her clothes further and further away from covering her. At one point Harry placed a row of kisses between Tonks' breasts stopping only an inch from her special place. She cooed at him the entire time fighting her way out of her clothes.

Harry looked into her eyes as he slowly massaged her breasts. He kneaded them gently and placed kisses on them when her nipples caught his eye. He gave her neck a series of kisses and nips with his mouth as she growled while reaching out for him. They played around until Tonks had become too worked up to sit idly by. She gave a throaty hum and pulled him on to her. She wiggled around to position herself beneath him strategically.

With a hungry kiss, Tonks wrapped her legs around Harry and forced him down to her. She grabbed on to him with her hand and directed him into her eagerly. Even with Harry on top, Tonks was directing the show from below. She ran her fingernails down his back squeezing his bum when she reached it. She tightened herself when Harry tried to slow down a bit and urged him on faster.

What started out as a leisurely stroll ended in an all out sprint. Tonks breathing was forced and shallow as she seemed to excise something from her body, and she used Harry to do it. As Tonks' breath stuttered and changed to gasps, she emitted halting shrieks. Harry felt her egg him on as he let go of all control and drifted to meet her heaving chest.

Harry waited as Tonks regained the ability to think. She opened her eyes and gazed into his longingly. "You always seem to know what I need, Harry. Thank you."

"I am more than happy help, Nymph. If you need anything else, let me know."

Tonks sighed and smiled at him. "I will set my wand for two hours, and then we will get up and eat something. I am too worn out right now to do anything other than be held by you and fall asleep."

“Like I said anything you need, Nymph.” Harry smiled as he pulled Tonks’ back to his chest. She wiggled her bum against him a few times to get comfortable chuckling when Harry responded.

“If you are a good boy, I might let you do that later,” Tonks teased as she closed her eyes and drifted off.

Harry awoke with shock as Tonks jerked in her sleep. “Harry, we have to go now!”

“What?” Harry asked groggily.

“Horace is calling us in, right now.” Tonks hopped out of bed her breasts bouncing and her pert bum working its way around the room gathering up her clothes. “It is serious, Harry. He said it was an emergency.”

Harry follow suit and began Summoning his clothes into his hands and putting them on. He caught both cloaks and waited for Tonks to finish tucking in her shirt before handing it to her. Once they were ready, cloaks on and hooded, Harry grabbed her hand and Apparated them to the team room. They arrived a couple seconds before Cal did, and Team Three ran to the training together. The hallway was a bustle of other Unspeakables some of which Harry recognized even in their cloaks.

Once they filtered through the doorway of the training room, Harry saw Horace and Marcus speaking quickly with Gillian. They broke apart and a booming voice silenced the chatter.

“Shut up!” Horace yelled. “Azkaban is under attack and has been for about four minutes now. Marcus has Team Two and Four. Gillian has Team One and Six, and I have Team Three and Five. We are going in to help the aurors defend the prison and keep the prisoners inside. If anyone on scene fires a Killing Curse, it is open season. Is that understood? No one escapes alive if we can help it. Cloaks to Auror Blue so they won’t attack us when we show up.

“We will start at the normal entry point and work our way forward. We do not know if there are any enemies on the island itself, but there were recorded spells near the docks. Remember, you can not

Apparate or portkey inside of the wards. You will find out the hard way if you try. We go in waves with Marcus first. Send a message back to let us know if we can come through. Go!"

Marcus and his teams Apparated away with varying pops or cracks. Harry looked to see Tonks taking a few controlled breaths. "Try it Ceps, it helps when things are exciting." Harry tried the safe technique and found it did help.

"Going to keep it together, Ceps?" Jones asked in a biting tone.

"Put that shite away right now, Jones," Horace snapped. "If it gets in the way today, I will have Ceps kill you when we get there. This has nothing to do with teams. Do you want every fucking criminal of the last thirty years back on the streets?"

Gillian must have received a message as her and her teams Apparated away. Harry waited for Horace to signal them to leave. He continued the breathing technique along with Tonks and even Cal had joined them. "Love this kind of thing, don't you?" Cal asked with a smile.

Horace stood with his eyes closed waiting. His wand held limply at his side. Harry could have sworn he heard Horace humming as he waited patiently. When he opened his eyes and squared his shoulders everyone looked at their teacher. "Go!" Horace barked and Apparated away.

Harry appeared in the clearing silently and led his team into the trees following Horace. Team Five trailed behind watching their backs and the sides. Horace motioned them ahead as he fell back to tell Michael something.

As Harry passed the old trees he had seen only hours before, they bore the traces of spell damage. A few trees in the distance were alight and others had been completely demolished. Shards of timber had been strewn in all directions a few were coated in blood yet the Operatives moved forward.

Once they breeched the trees and entered the open space ahead, Harry saw groups fighting furiously. Spells were volleying back and

forth as if it was a game. The signal it wasn't was the occasional person falling to the ground unconscious, screaming, or dead. Harry felt the need to help those he could and went to run and join them. Horace called for them to stop and find which group needed the help most.

Harry saw a pair of aurors against five Death Eaters and led his team in that direction. Numbers even, Harry lined up his wand and fired a Repelling spell at them in an attempt to give the aurors a rest and allow his team to choose their targets. The spell worked and knocked the five black cloaks in various directions and all of them off their feet.

When the aurors' immediate enemies posed little threat, they turned to Harry's Team and aimed their wands at them. "Not us, them!" Harry yelled as he bound one of the fallen Death Eaters. The other four started attacking again and tried to finish off what they had started. Tonks selected her opponent and began working them over with a variety of spells. Cal had held back and launched his assault from a distance covering everyone before helping whoever was out classed.

Harry slid into his normal fighting routine and let his magic dictate the speed and frequency of his spells. As Harry dropped his second enemy with a Bone Breaking Curse to the leg, he had a chance to survey the battlefield. The number of aurors was nearly equal that of the Unspeakables. There were at least twenty or more Death Eaters still on their feet. *'Snape said there were no more than thirty didn't he? And we caught more since then. That bastard has been lying to us.'*

His angry thoughts were disrupted by a Severing Curse barely missing his head. With a growl, Harry launched into a furious series of spells alternating between using his wand and wandlessly to cast them. The teams had formed a crescent shape around the Death Eaters and were forcing them into a tighter shape. Thus far, Harry hadn't seen the Killing Curse cast by anyone. A few aurors lay on the ground motionless and were most likely dead, but many had nasty wounds caused by more than a few curses.

The fight waged back and forth as Harry had to fend off two Death Eaters who had moved from the other group to personally hold him off. Things seemed at a standstill while Harry blocked a series of spells and returned a few of his own. The temporary stalemate allowed a Death Eater to free his fallen comrades so they could rejoin the fight. Harry could hear Horace telling Thor to “hold back” and “not go there yet.”

Tonks was fighting next to Harry and holding her own against a rather fast opponent. She wasn't getting many offensive spells off, but she had avoided getting hit thus far. Cal continued firing shot after shot from his vantage point on the hill. For the most part, his spells were distractions so the front line people could take them down. Marcus was flicking his wand quickly keeping his enemy at bay and preventing them from gaining ground and breaking free of the grouping they had been rustled into.

Harry was getting frustrated because as soon as he dropped one Death Eater, another would take his place and third would get the first one back into the fight in whatever shape they could. One thought kept playing over in his head, *'they are stalling.'* Harry couldn't stop thinking that as the minutes ticked by. His side was beginning to take down their enemies and gain a little ground after Harry started firing two spells at once at one person. He had taken down three in a row before checking on Tonks again.

His concentration was thrown as a shout came up from the far side of the group. “Holy shite, run!” “Merlin help us!” Harry looked in that direction to see a group of Death Eaters walk away from the dock area. Most had a wild look to them and their movements were jerky and feral. Harry guessed the balance had just been tipped in the Death Eaters' favour.

The black cloaks seemed to fight harder and with more determination when their allies joined their ranks. The final nail in the coffin for the momentum of the fight was driven home when the Dark Lord appeared behind his followers. “Enough toying, now we show these blood-traitors what death really looks like. Kill them all,” Voldemort said smoothly with a demented smile playing on his lips.

Harry saw his side fall back once Voldemort showed his ghastly face. He knew it was all over unless something dramatically changed. He watched as two of the freed Death Eaters leveled their wands and fired the Killing Curse at two aurors. They never had a chance since they were still staring at Voldemort frozen in fear. "Fuck it," Harry yelled as he moved around the quickly spreading group of Unspeakables. Everyone added distance between their neighbors to avoid getting hit by an errant Killing Curse that missed.

Harry circled around to Marcus' side which was trying to contain the new additions to the fight. Harry saw Lucius Malfoy strike down another auror with a sickly green bolt of light from his wand. Harry watched the man fall limply to the ground releasing one last breath before he went silent. Lucius laughed joyfully as he relished in the man's death.

Feeling his anger move to the front of his mind, Harry fired a Bone Exploding Curse at the white-haired man. Lucius managed to raise a shield in time to stop most of the effects, but some of Harry's spell breeched the shield's barrier. A crack of a bone was followed quickly by the normally arrogant man falling into a puddle of mud and muck screaming and grabbing his left arm.

"We have a hero in our midst," Voldemort sung as he turned his feared wand on Harry. "Your only chance to run away, mortal, before I kill you. Slowly," the snake-like man added menacingly.

Harry thought up his best response or witting remark. None seemed to fit the situation well enough so he answered with his wand. "Avada Kedavra," Harry forced out thinking of his parents and their attempt to save him. Harry didn't wait until the spell reached its target before following it up with "Crucio" "Ossis Disffringo" and "Rumpere Lemniscus" moving his wand in a whipping motion trying to strike Voldemort down regardless of what the other spells did.

The battle around him had seemingly stopped completely. Everyone had stilled to a certain point when Voldemort had spoken, but no one moved when Harry responded with the Killing Curse against the most feared man in the world. The Death Eaters were angered that anyone would dare attack their master, but the Unspeakables were shocked

that their newest member would carelessly throw his life away by attacking the strongest enemy they had ever met.

Voldemort expected the man to run away or cower while he dismembered him slowly. What he got was his most favoured colour in the world fired at him. He Conjured an obstacle to absorb the spell so he wouldn't look stupid diving out of its way. He heard the next spell and managed to sidestep it half a second before it landed. The third spell struck Voldemort's Imprimis shield that sprung to life on his arm, but the Severing Ribbon nearly knocked Voldemort over when it lashed against his shield the first time. After the second and third time, Voldemort had to drop into a crouch to avoid being sent airborne.

The sheer force of magic gave Voldemort cause to make a vital decision as to the future of his current mission. "Grab our brothers and leave. We have gotten what we came for." He barely had time to speak his words before another series of spells splashed into his shield. Returning the greeting, Voldemort sent the same spells against his blue cloaked opponent.

Harry saw his spells stopped by Voldemort's shield and tried to follow them up with more, but the return volley forced him to defend. Not caring if he looked like a fish out of water, Harry dove, jumped, and spun away from as many as he could. His own Imprimis shield flared to life as he fired a few spells back at the man he was destined to kill or be killed by. Harry couldn't worry about the other Death Eaters as he needed his entire focus on the Dark Lord before him.

The aurors started falling back and the Unspeakables were forced to keep in line with them or risk getting caught in the middle. As the line shifted, the wounded Death Eaters were Levitated, carried, or Banished out of range of the wards. Once free of the magical oppression, they were portkeyed away or Apparated under their own power.

With only a few able bodied followers left, Voldemort began his retreat to the ward line with Harry attacking him the entire way. "Don't know when to quit, do you? Maybe I should remind you of why I am the most feared man in the world. Avada Kedavra, Crucio."

Harry dropped his shield and Conjured the marble slab to absorb the Killing Curse. The rock exploded in a cloud of powder and bits of rock. The Cruciatus Curse slipped through and hit Harry in the leg. With a stifled cry, Harry collapsed to the muddy ground.

"That sounded familiar," Voldemort pondered aloud.

Harry fought the pain using Occlumency and memories of Tonks only hours before. As a reward to Voldemort, Harry forced every ounce of will and intent he had left in him before the pain took control. *'Ossis Fragmen.'*

Tonks watched Harry fall under the Torture Curse and heard what was said. She willed Harry to fight the spell. She willed him to live. A spell shooting from Harry's wand told her that he was going to survive. She watched the spell hit the Dark Lord in the right arm breaking the spell.

Harry fell forward into the mud gasping for breath as his entire body screamed in agony. At first he thought it was him screaming, but the taste of earth in his mouth told him it wasn't. The unearthly scream that was emitted by the Dark Lord, as he gripped his broken arm and Apparated away, left an unforgettable memory in the minds of all who were conscious. The Dark Lord could be hurt. He wasn't invincible.

"Ha..." Tonks stopped herself from finishing her yell as she ran to Harry. "Ceps!" She fell to her knees more than a meter away from him but slid on the mud coming to rest at his side. "Are you okay? Anything more than the Cruciatus?"

Taking a forced breath and fighting the white spots in his eyes, Harry looked into the frantically worried expression on Tonks' face. Many others had grouped around Harry but kept a safe distance from the only person they knew of who had ever landed a spell on the Dark Lord.

"I am a little sore, but I think everything still works," Harry said coughing a few times. "Did I get him in the head?"

"No," Tonks answered him trying not to kiss him in front of everyone. "You did get him in the arm though."

“Fuck, missed. Next time I will do better, Horace.” Harry’s voice faded as exhaustion took a firm grasp on him.

“Chamel, Cal,” Horace ordered. “Get Ceps to Medical now. Everyone else secure the remaining enemy, prepare the wounded for treatment, clean up, and count the dead. Aurors over here!”

Harry felt Tonks grab his arm and try to pull him up. She slipped a few times in the mud until Cal took Harry’s other arm. Together, as a team, they left the field of battle and headed to the edge of the wards. Tonks took out a portkey and tapped it taking them all back to the team room. When they arrived, Cal started to pull Harry towards the door but he resisted.

“I will walk there if I can,” Harry said firmly. Cal shrugged and let go of Harry’s arm. Tonks kept a hold of him refusing to let go.

“I am not letting you go,” Tonks told him. “If I do and you get hurt more, what will I do then?”

Beginning to lose focus as his body and mind started shutting down from exhaustion, Harry smirked looking Tonks in the eyes. “It will guarantee me more affection, Nymphadora.”

“As if you need more of that,” Tonks quipped before she realized that Cal was still in the room. “Not a word, you. Not a word.”

Cal moved to take up Harry’s arm again. “Never let me call you by that name without taking my life into my own hands. You two must be really close.”

“Help me get him to Medical,” Tonks begged as Harry had almost passed out on her. “He is stubborn and heavy.”

The last thing Harry remembered was the floor sliding under his feet as he was dragged into Medical by his teammates.

Harry’s eyes fluttered open as he fought against the ache in his body. Everything was sore and the chatter in the room wasn’t helping his already frayed nerves. He looked around and saw Tonks discussing something with Cal at the foot of his bed. A few other beds were

occupied and their team members stood by waiting for them to be released.

Harry moved his foot getting Tonks' attention and ending their discussion. "Ceps," Tonks whispered. "I am so glad that you are awake. If you feel up to it, we can leave. You need to take two potions to boost your energy and deal with the soreness before they let you out though.

"Whatever it takes to get out of here," Harry said at a volume high enough that many of the occupants in the room took notice instantly. "Where are they? The faster the better; I hate hospital."

Mimi hurried over and handed him two potions. Harry downed them with practiced efficiency and tried to stand. His balance was slightly off, but he fought through it using Tonks to steady him before aiming for the door. It was hard to not to notice the fact that everyone in the room followed him with their eyes even though most had their head shrouded by their hoods.

Harry pushed on counting the number of beds occupied; three. "How many aurors did we lose?"

Tonks provided the answer, "Five died, but considering the number we were up against that is amazingly small."

"How many of them escaped?" Harry wanted to know if it was worth it at all. "Who got away?"

"Eight won't be joining their master again," Horace informed Harry when he entered the very door Harry was trying to leave. "We still have the three from Knockturn Alley and three more that didn't make it out when *He* left suddenly."

"Any of them worth the time?" Harry asked guessing at the answer.

Horace squinted before answering. "If I understand your line of questioning correctly, no, none of them are worth the effort to keep alive. Tomorrow should be an interesting day press wise what with everything that happened today and what the Minister is most likely going to do tomorrow."

“So Azkaban fell before we got there?” Harry asked rubbing his face in weariness.

“While we were kept busy with those on the shore, *He* breeched the prison.” Horace scanned the room looking at everyone who was paying attention. “They waited until we had left and were home before they attacked. There was an inside man. They waited until we transported the bulk of our lot to the prison before breaking in. Thing is, every member of the prison’s guard staff was killed, well the humans at least. A couple Dementors remained, but they won’t for long. With no victims to feed off of, they will move on.”

“So, the group we fought was a diversion,” Harry figured out. “I thought they were trying to kill time. Makes sense until their friends and Voldemort could show up.”

The sound of air being sucked in irritated Harry further. The Unspeakables, his allies, were acting like a bunch of Hogwarts students. “What? Can’t hear his name without wanting to run home to mum? Pathetic bunch you are. If you weren’t so damn busy watching me and Voldemort, you could have stopped more of them.”

“Think you are hot shit, Ceps?” Jones challenged. “Just because you lived you think that makes you better than the rest of us?”

Harry stepped away from Tonks arm and took laboured steps until he was directly in front of Jones. “I can say the name Voldemort without whimpering like a little girl. I not only lived, I fought him. Where were you? If I am the only one willing to stand up to the Dark Tosser and fight then we might as well all lie down and die. He is willing to pick us off one at a time if need be.”

“I am not stupid enough to poke a dragon in the eye on the off chance it is having a good day and won’t kill me for my trouble,” Jones retorted.

“You would rather sit at home and wait until Voldemort shows up at your door and blasts it in,” Harry snapped back. “That wasn’t the first time I have fought him and it isn’t going to be the last either.”

“Now you are just talking out of your arse, Ceps,” Jones laughed. “Only two people have lived after standing up to *Him* and you are neither.”

“Do you think he advertises how many live after he tries to kill them?” Harry asked forcefully trying to cover his mistake. “Wouldn’t do well for the greatest murderer of all time to have so many lose ends laying about now does it? Now get out of my way so I can go home and rest up in case *He* shows up again. Merlin knows where you will be when that happens, probably hiding under your bed or in a cupboard.”

Jones went for his wand, but Horace grabbed his hand firmly and pulled it down. “Draw your wand on him, Jones, and I will bury you myself. He proved his worth last week, and he proved it again today. A smart man would learn from what he sees and hears; what are you?”

Jones said nothing but slowly lowered his wand and stepped back. Harry sighed and took a few steps before faltering slightly. Tonks rushed to his side and propped him up. They walked out of the room and into the hallway where Harry leaned against the wall trying to regain some strength.

“I need to relax and get some sleep,” Harry complained. “That bastard took a lot out of me.”

Tonks grabbed his arm and led him to the team room so they could portkey to Potter Estate. “There is a very good reason you are weak. The amount of power you were putting into your spells was a big reason most of us watched the fight. It is one thing to see magic being thrown about, but to feel it as well is something completely different.”

“Glad I could entertain everyone,” Harry forced out between clenched teeth as he weakened with each step. They finally reached the team room and portkeyed away. Tonks had to Levitate Harry up the stairs, through the bedroom, and into the bathroom. She deposited him in the bath and removed his clothes before running the water.

“To soothe away your aches and pains.”

"I let him get away, Nymph. I could have stopped him. I tried but I wasn't good enough. He nearly killed me again. When is he going to get it right and finish me off?"

"As long as we work together, that won't happen, Harry. You are better than him in every way. You will get him sooner or later." At Harry's dismal look she reinforced her point. "It will happen when it is supposed to happen."

"And how many more will die before then?"

"Less than if you gave up," Tonks prodded. "Now, you be quiet and let me work away your troubles."

Harry submitted to her soft and small hands massaging his body until he was a picture perfect prune. He hobbled to bed and curled into Tonks for a change. Her soft breast made a wonderful pillow for his sleepy head.

Friday was a recovery day for the teams. The Ministry had swooped in after everything had calmed down and taken over. Rumour had it that Amelia Bones was livid at the response time of the aurors to help at the prison. An old directive from Fudge's stint as Minister was blamed for the chain of command breaking down before Kingsley or Bones were notified. It was a good thirty minutes before the information had filtered through the ranks and reached them.

Amelia had never had to deal with an incident like a mass prison break during her stead as Director of the Magical Law Enforcement Division so she hadn't ran into the problem. She corrected the situation and followed up by looking at every order Fudge had put in place and vetoed any that seemed to stall the response to a catastrophe. The papers were all a thither over the prison break that they mostly ignored the notice that every Death Eater was declared an enemy of the state.

Any holdouts within the Ministry to the efforts Amelia was putting forth kept quiet as the public rallied around her. The vast amount of unfiltered information leaving the Ministry and going to the papers kept the press on her side. Nothing secret was revealed, but it didn't need to be to be leagues ahead of the drivel Fudge shared. Everyone

had the sense that for once in a long while the Ministry was working for them and not against them.

Tonks received a message from Dumbledore that an Order meeting was scheduled for Sunday and it was important that Harry be there even though that was part of the agreement reached during the first meeting of the summer.

Saturday was uneventful as Harry lounged around the house and played with Tonks. They either worked on different spells or each other. Tiki had walked in on them more than a few times and had finally given up on cleaning some of the rooms until she knew they were asleep or sequestered away in Harry's room.

Sunday slipped away as Harry spent much of his time working on his Occlumency with Tonks. She proved to him that she was rather handy with the skill even if she didn't slam into his barriers. She was very adept at distracting him and slipping through his defenses.

"I know they won't use my particular techniques, but it is best to be skilled in all forms of detection," Tonks explained as she rebuttoned her shirt. "Now, we try again." Tonks worked on his mental shields for hours until they had to get to the meeting.

Harry created a return portkey and checked his cloak for all of the important bits he might need. He stilled his mind until Tonks joined him on the bed. "Ready to go, Harry?"

"No time like the present, I guess," Harry said non-committally.

"That is my Harry," Tonks joked roughing his hair more than normal. She gave him a solid kiss before grabbing his hand tightly. "If you will assist me through the wards, dear sir."

Harry Apparated them to the park where they began the short walk to Grimmauld Place. They climbed the stairs and Harry knocked sharply. When they heard the locks being disengaged, they released each other's hand. When the door opened, Harry was greeted by Remus smiling at him.

“Wonderful to see you again, Harry,” Remus spoke in a soft tone. “I hope everything is well for you.” Remus looked at both of them smiling and getting his real question across.

“Things are wonderful, Moony,” Harry answered. “This has been the best summer yet. Everything go alright over the past few days?”

Remus frowned. “With me, everything went fine. It’s the rest of the world that has had a hard time of it. I am sure you read about Azkaban.”

“Yes, I did. Funny that Snape didn’t warn us before it happened.” Harry closed the door behind him as Tonks slipped in next to him. She ran her hand over his shoulder before leaving them alone and walking into the living room. A chorus of greetings told Harry that many had already arrived.

“I see things are just as good as or better than they were when I left,” Remus observed giving Harry a one armed hug.

“I am in over my head, Moony,” Harry sighed with a smile stretching across his face. “But it feels so comfortable, and I don’t know, perfect. Like I said, best summer yet.”

They entered the living room to find they were the last to arrive. Dumbledore stood from a conjured chintz chair and moved to join them. “Remus, perhaps you can take my seat while I speak with Harry for a moment.”

Remus looked to Harry and saw the relaxed way he had entered the house had left. “Is that okay with you, Harry?”

“Fine.” Harry met Dumbledore’s gaze and never let it go. Once they were alone and Dumbledore had moved them into the kitchen, he sighed deeply, removed his glasses, and rubbed his eyes.

“Of my mistakes in life,” Dumbledore spoke with a regrettable tone, “you have suffered the most from them. I am truly sorry for that. Not as your headmaster, nor your teacher, but as any other man; I ask your forgiveness. You do not need to give me an answer now, I prefer you don’t. Please, reserve your reply until a later time after you have

thought it over and I have had time to show you I am sorry. Now, let's rejoin our friends and discuss recent events and plan for the future."

Completely thrown, Harry followed Dumbledore back to the living room where everyone was waiting. The first thing Harry really noticed was that Ron and Ginny weren't there. "Where is Ron and Ginny?"

"Oh they are at home, dear," Molly told him as she finished hugging him and trying to straighten his hair. "More stubborn than a Weasley," Molly comment as she gave up on his raven hair.

Harry gave her a warm smile and joked, "Have to fit in with you guys somehow." He scanned the room and saw the regulars along with a few extras. Next to twins were Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, and Oliver Wood. "What are you guys doing here?" Harry asked in a slightly demanding tone.

Taken back by the forceful way Harry had asked, Wood was the only one to answer. "The twins flooded me and asked if I wanted to help out. Made more sense than anything else they had asked me before, so here I am."

Harry turned and looked Dumbledore in the eyes demanding an answer. "You challenged my willingness to act, Harry. We needed more people so I got more people. They have a right to fight for what they believe in the same as you."

"Not like I have a choice," Harry relented knowing he should have guessed as much. "I am glad to see you here and not on the other side." Harry received smiles and nods from the past Gryffindors.

"Red and gold always sticks together, Harry," Angelina said with as much zest as any speech she gave as Quidditch captain.

"Now, we have a lot to cover since both sides have been rather active in the last few weeks." Dumbledore looked over the group with a measure gaze. "Harry, care to give us a rundown of what you have been up to."

Harry met the look and smiled. "Death Eaters attacked Hermione's. She stayed with me for bit until I had her house protected. They went

back last week. I think Snape can tell us why Voldemort stopped by shortly after the Grangers were returned home.” Snape sneered and glared at Harry. “Oh yes, I was there. I was twenty feet away when Voldemort was looking for the house. I cheered when Wormtail was tortured. By the way, what were you and he talking about before you portkeyed him away?”

Dumbledore snapped his head to Snape and waited for an answer. “Our discussion is no concern of yours, Potter. I am surprised you held back and didn’t try to be the hero again. Learning for once?”

Harry laughed. “No, Hermione and Tonks held me back. I learned shortly after that. I wonder where else you have been when things happened?”

“Harry, please continue,” Dumbledore prompted. “I know you have been doing more than visiting the Grangers. Oh, and a wonderful job with their security too. I have yet to be able to find their home or business. Excellent ward work.”

“Cost a fortune,” Tonks mumbled but it was loud enough to be heard. Bill was visibly nodding his head in the corner.

“Money is just that,” Harry dismissed the comment. “Been flying some and enjoying my summer. For once, I don’t want to go back to school.”

“That would be a treat,” Snape hissed.

“For both of us,” Harry agreed with the Potions Master for the first time in his life.

“I know there has been more than that, but I will not press the issue now.” Dumbledore took control of the meeting again, “The events of a few days ago have the entire world on alert. Voldemort has his best Death Eaters back in the fold. The break out was a huge hit against us and the Ministry. I know none of this is a mystery to any of you, but I am confident that many didn’t read deeper into that issue of the Prophet. It seems that all Death Eaters have been declared enemies of the state. I am sure there are few here who know what that

means.” Dumbledore steeped his fingers. Would you mind informing us, Harry?”

Harry smirked as all eyes turned to him yet again. “It means that all of their holdings may be purchased away from them. Any ownership in companies, ventures, or the like can be taken away without their consent at market value.”

“Am I safe to assume that you informed the Minister of that long forgotten law?” Dumbledore asked his raised eyebrows and a thoughtful look on his face.

“You would be safe in assuming that.”

“And who would be able to buy up the shares released by such a maneuver?”

“I believe a couple goblins are working on that,” Harry pondered.

“More like ten,” Bill added. On Dumbledore’s query, Bill elaborated. “Gringotts was a madhouse on Friday. Ragnok called in some of the best financial minds the bank has at its disposal. They were generating more activity in an hour than the bank normally does in a week. I was put on a secure detail that ferried goblins between your vaults, Harry, and over twenty others around the system.”

“Care to enlighten us, Harry?” The headmaster requested leaving little doubt that he wanted an answer.

“I haven’t met with Ragnok yet, but it seems that I most likely spent quite a bit of money on Friday. Though, I am sure I got something for it.” Harry couldn’t help but enjoy the looks he saw on everyone’s faces. The best was the one Albus wore.

“Are there any more surprises, Harry?” Dumbledore asked but only found a smirk as a reply. “I see that you are going to let us find out the hard way then. Regardless of what happens, that was an inventive strategy to tackle Voldemort’s financial base.”

“Ragnok brought it up,” Harry informed him. “Thank him not me.”

Albus inclined his head in response. "It took both of you and an army of goblins to execute it. Well done, Harry. Now, something happened in Knockturn alley earlier in the week and the Ministry has no record of it. It would seem that our belief that the Department of Mysteries is involved in this war is indeed true at this time. I asked everyone that would know about something like this and only three people declined comment. Those people are in special positions in the Ministry and the fact that they refused to answer told me what I needed to know."

"And how does that affect us, Albus," Moody rumbled.

"For our safety if we are on a mission of our own and we come into contact with people in slightly odd looking grey cloaks, do what they say and do not point your wand at them," Albus stressed. "They are most likely Unspeakables and not the ones locked away in the basement of the Ministry researching Merlin knows what. They are empowered by the Ministry to do what needs done to protect the Ministry. They can and will kill if they feel threatened. I will say that they are generally on our side and will make for a formidable obstacle against Voldemort."

"They were at Azkaban, Headmaster," Snape interrupted. "They were the bulk of the force against the escape. One of them even fought the Dark Lord personally. Amazingly, he managed to land a spell. *He* wasn't happy afterwards." Snape shuddered as he went silent.

"Things are looking brighter for us," Albus said cheerfully. "I will have to work with the Ministry more closely so we aren't getting in their way."

Harry wanted an answer to a question that had bothered him for a while. "Professor?"

Albus tilted his head graciously, "Yes, Harry."

"It seems that Snape has been at every Death Eater mission lately," Harry said. "Why haven't we been alerted before these things happen? Did you know about the attack on Hermione's before it happened?"

Snape fumed as Harry splayed open a very touchy subject. "Harry, Professor Snape is in a difficult position almost daily. He tells me what he can when he can."

"I wasn't asking you, Albus," Harry never took his eyes off of Snape. "I would like an answer, Snape. If you knew about Hermione and Azkaban before they happened, you should have told us."

Snape had enough and reached his limit of being chastised by a Potter. "And do what, Potter? Trade my position for the life of one know-it-all girl and her muggle family? To stop the first attempt at breaking into Azkaban? *He* would have kept trying until he broke in."

The greasy haired man realized too late that his comment about Hermione was a misstep. Harry had been moving towards him slowly in a non-threatening way until he was about six feet away. Once Harry reached that distance, he struck. He leapt at Snape pulling out the knife he had in his cloak. With the tip pointing in the same direction as his elbow, Harry made a v-shape with the two and placed both on either side of his neck and pinned him against the wall.

Harry's growth spurt had equaled out the height difference to the point that it didn't matter. Harry grabbed Snape's wand with his left hand and pinned it against Snape's chest holding it in place. The movement had forced the spy to the side and put his neck in direct contact with the blade of the dagger Harry sunk into the wall. Snape saw the fire in Harry's eyes and exhaled through his mouth at a loss of what to do.

Harry's eyes bored into Snape's. He tried to set the man alight with his gaze. He heard a rustling behind him, but he didn't care. He heard Tonks order people back and he knew that she had her wand out. "Yes, Severus," Harry hissed nearly bordering on Parseltongue. "You should give up your position to stop an attack on Azkaban. You should give your life to stop an attack on Hermione and her family."

Mustering all the fortitude he had, Snape asked, "And why should I?"

Harry allowed a feral smile to show on his face. "Because, I promise you that if you let her or any of my friends die to save your fucking position, I will kill you myself. No Dumbledore or Voldemort would be

able to save you. That is my vow to you. Let them die and you will join them.” Harry squeezed Snape’s hand until his entire arm was shaking from the stress.

Snape’s expression broke first as he saw the truth in Harry’s words. He felt Harry fight against the desire to end his life. He saw the look of a killer beneath the surface of Harry’s eyes before the normal softness returned to the bright green eyes. Harry pushed away slowly and let the edge of the knife trail equally slowly along Snape’s neck. A surgically fine cut was left in its wake and blood was pulled in his collar by gravity.

Harry maintained eye contact as he wiped the blade on his cloak and returned it to its place. Harry slid back to his place against the wall and saw half of the room had their wands out, but they were aimed at the floor. When he reached Tonks, he saw that she did have her wand out and it was aimed directly at Dumbledore who still looked ready to stop Harry. “I am willing to trade my life for my friends. Are any of you willing to do the same thing?”

Albus sighed and lowered his wand and put it away. He seemed deep in thought as he mulled over what he would say. A smile told Harry that things were going to be okay so he pulled his hand away from the portkey in his pocket and tapped Tonks on the foot to signal she could let go of his cloak.

“The passion of youth,” Albus said longingly. “Invigorating as always, Harry. Severus, perhaps you should tend to that wound before you pass out.”

Snape left the house quickly and quietly as Wood blurted out, “That is how he plays Quidditch. I knew he was going to be perfect the minute I saw that look on his face...” Alicia smacked Wood on the back of his head to stop him from going off on one of his frequent tirades.

The meeting continued with Harry and Tonks standing close together and waiting for someone to yell at them. It never happened and most people left that night thinking about what Harry had said. Were they willing to die for their friends? Their family was an easy decision but their friends was a more difficult choice.

Before he left, Harry felt a strong but thin hand on his shoulder. "I admire your passion, Harry, but Severus deals with so much and he never gets a break from it. The Mark is more than a simple Mark."

Harry lifted his hair to show his famous scar. "I, more than anybody, know exactly what that means, Professor. But that has never stopped me from doing what is right."

Albus smiled in a grandfatherly way before speaking. "And that is why you are Harry Potter and not Severus Snape. You have yet to make that choice at a moment of weakness. Some day Severus might tell you his story and you may find sympathy for him. Until then, keep doing what you are doing, Harry. You have shown me this summer that you are up to the challenge that will ultimately be Voldemort."

Harry relaxed and tried to look at his life from a neutral point of view. The only thing he saw was himself as an old man second guessing the decisions he made decades before and always finding faults with them. Harry wasn't sure if they were his own thoughts or ones Dumbledore planted in his mind some how, but it was a valid worry if he lived long enough for it to matter.

"You do not have my forgiveness," Harry began and saw Dumbledore visibly slump, "yet. Given time, honesty, and survival, I believe we will be able to work beyond the past." Harry held out his hand in a truce for everything that had happened between them.

"Always what is right, never what is easy," Dumbledore said grasping Harry's hand firmly and with surprising strength. "I believe this is yours." Albus pulled out an envelope marked like every other Hogwarts start of term letter. "Choose your classes wisely, Harry. The future does not always go where we think it will. Were it so, I would have been the best confectioner in the Wizarding world had I had my way."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at such a silly image that sprouted in his mind. Dumbledore with cotton candy sticking to all of his hair, lollies poking out of his pockets, and chocolate covering his hands as he fumbled with bits of wrapping. "Care for a sour, Harry?" Dumbledore asked holding out a bag of lemon sours.

“No thanks, Professor, but thank you for offering all the same.” Harry smiled and walked out the door with Tonks at his side.

17. I Would Do It Again

Monday was a busy day filled with training designed to further improve the teamwork within Team Three and their interaction with Team Two. Harry thought things were going really well, but Horace had a sense of tension about him that made Harry uneasy. The relaxed feel of the lessons the week before were gone and replaced by a tautness that weighed on everyone present.

Tonks felt it and told Harry it happened every time things looked really bad for the Wizarding world. "The Ministry comes to Marcus and Horace to try and fix things. We don't understand the pressures placed on them from above, but they are most likely tasked to find the escaped Death Eaters and bring them in. The aurors have the same job, but speaking from experience on both sides it is worse here. We always deliver and that is a formidable record to work with."

"I can certainly understand being weighed down by your past," Harry offered.

Tonks smiled and rubbed Harry shoulders as she leaned towards him. "I know that you do, sweetie. Teach us all how to handle it as well as you do since you are the expert."

"Well," Harry started talking in his best impersonation of McGonagall. "First you put all the expectations in the bin where they belong."

Harry and Tonks were enjoying their break in the corner of the training room and never noticed Team Five enter for a pre-arranged meeting with Horace in the classroom area. They didn't see the shrouded glare from Jones when he walked in, and they didn't feel his growing anger as he watched them the entire time Horace spoke to his team.

When the briefing was over, Horace called Team Three over to him. Jones watched and waited for the opportunity to insult Ceps as they walked closer. Horace simply looked on and waited for the confrontation to happen as he knew it needed to occur or things would never be resolved.

As Harry and Tonks walked closer to Horace, Jones spoke out. "Better watch your bitch, Ceps, or someone might come along and prove to her what a real man is like."

Harry tried to let the comment slide but couldn't get beyond the insult to Tonks. "I suggest you watch yourself, Jones, or I might show you what a real man does when his friends are insulted."

"Friends my arse," Jones challenged. "You are just another in a list of people she gets close to and casts off when she gets bored."

Harry never had the chance to respond when Tonks got in Jones' face and threatened him. "You know nothing of it you pathetic yob. You are just mad that I refused to date you all those times you threw yourself at me. Sad sack you are."

Jones reacted to the slight against his manhood by backhanding Tonks across the face. The smack and resulting snap of Tonks head triggered a series of events that left most in the room flatfooted. Tonks reeled from the impact of Jones' rather solid hand against her cheek. She did manage to stay on her feet and was able to witness Harry's retribution.

Jones almost got out a laugh before he saw Harry's wand appear and strike unmercilessly. "Crucio," was Harry's simple reply to Jones striking Tonks. Harry watched Jones fall to the floor and writhe around in pain. He howled in agony as Harry held him under the Torture Curse. Horace had winced when he saw Harry lash out. He remembered the sting of that spell from Harry's wand and he never wished it on another even if they deserved it.

Members of both teams watched as one of their own shuddered on the floor of the training room. They did nothing but watch since no one wanted to interrupt the only person they had ever seen fight the Dark Lord and live. No more than a minute after it began, Tonks placed her hand on Harry's and asked him to stop.

Harry released the spell and felt his mind regain control of his actions. The sick feeling that he had fought with weeks before as he learned the dark magic came back with a vengeance. He was swimming in darkness again and somehow it freed him from his worries. As he

looked at the still squirming man on the floor, he felt oddly detached and invigorated at the same time.

Only when Harry looked in Tonks' soft and understanding eyes did he completely return to the world. The first sight of blood on the corner of her lips renewed his anger at Jones and almost led to a repeat of the curse.

"Thank you," Tonks told him. "Thank you and I consider it finished. You do not need to do anything more on this, Ceps."

Harry nodded but felt he needed to do something more even if she thought he didn't. Harry took a few steps and closed the distance with Jones who was finally taking gasping breaths to refill his lungs. Harry looked down and saw a pathetic man trying to be more than he could accomplish and not the more experienced Operative that Jones had been. Bending down to look at Jones under his hood Harry said with quiet force, "Strike Chamel again or insult her like that once more, and you won't make it another day."

Harry stood up and stepped back catching a glimpse of the spectators. Most were surprised but none looked hostile. Horace moved next to Jones' recovering form and stared at the man for a few seconds before posing his question. "Is this conflict settled? And I mean the one between you and Ceps."

Jones scanned the room and saw the reaction he had received. He was in the wrong and no one looked ready to support him. Taking a few deep breaths and fixating on Harry's still exposed wand, Jones replied. "It is done. I know my place."

Horace waited for Harry to accept the answer before doing the same to Tonks. Receiving a positive nod from both, Horace addressed the room. "Ceps is the leader of Team Three and that is that. As I would expect, the leader of a team defends his people when necessary. This matter is closed and no mention of it need be made moving forward. Is that understood?"

Everyone voiced their understanding and moved off to their appointed locations. Horace helped Jones up by offering his hand. Pulling him close, Horace said, "Hurts like hell, doesn't it? I learned early on to

leave Chamel alone. If you try this shite again, Ceps will most likely kill you and I will Oblivate what is left and dump it in the nearest gutter. Do not pull something like this again. I promise you will not survive it. Now, see Medical before returning. You will hurt for a few days after this, trust me.”

Jones mustered his strength and worked his way to Medical taking a lot of time and numerous breaks to regain his composure. The bite of Harry’s spell had firmly set a rule in his mind. *‘There is a reason Ceps could attack the Dark Lord and survive.’*

Harry and Tonks worked the remainder of the day with Cal and Horace. Harry found a letter waiting for him in the team room from Gringotts. A quick discussion between Harry and Tonks led them to making plans for a visit at Gringotts after work. Harry guessed that it had to do with all the activity on Friday and how much it cost him.

As the day wound down, Harry finished leading his team on individual missions similar to the one in Knockturn Alley or grouped with Team Two and Robeen leading the overall mission. Harry found Robeen to be agreeable and willing to let Harry handle his part of the mission his own way without telling him how to do it step-by-step. Team Two’s leader also accepted Harry’s ideas willingly and only turned them down after explaining how the goals could be accomplished in another way that was easier or safer.

Harry, along with Tonks, left for Gringotts having learned a lot about leading and his team’s abilities. The pair arrived in Diagon Alley at the normal Apparition point and began the trek to the bank in the end-of-work crowds. Harry felt Tonks holding on to him as they were buffeted by witches and wizards hurrying about. Many looked over their shoulders as if the escaped Death Eaters were going to pop up and kill them on the spot.

Everything seemed stupid and ludicrous to Harry as they traveled half way up the alley. A loud crash at one end of the alley sent many to the street covering their heads while others fumbled with their wands trying to draw them and find a target. A frightened shopkeeper holding an empty tray and staring at the remains of her shattered glassware on the stone street caused Harry to laugh.

His laugh was the only one as many put their wands away in a shaky fashion. One person seemed annoyed at Harry's laugh and grabbed him by the collar. "Something funny?" The man said as he spun Harry around to look at him.

The unsuspecting man found two wands pressed firmly in his throat and chest. After his eyes traveled from the wand tips to Harry's face, his expression grew even more scared. He almost trembled as recognition of who he held on to dawned on him.

Harry stopped laughing the second he was grabbed by the man. All too often Harry had been grabbed, pulled, shoved, or struck for no reason and it wasn't going to happen again. "I suggest you release me, Sir," Harry spoke quietly as Tonks pressed her wand into the man's chest even harder. "I am not the one jumping at my own shadow."

The man swallowed hard and released Harry instantly trying to smooth out Harry's freshly rumpled robes. He saw the unspoken threat in Harry's eyes. In that instant he knew what it took to look death in the face and he knew he didn't have it in him. The young man never trembled or blinked from fear like he was having trouble preventing as he tried to move away. "Most of us still remember the first time, Mr. Potter."

Harry snorted brushing the comment aside. "Learn from the mistakes of the first time so we aren't repeating them. Otherwise, Voldemort is that much closer to victory than us."

The collective gasps and screams around the alley caused Harry to close his eyes and shake his head. When he opened his eyes he saw many looking around as if the devil was after them. "If mention of his name reduces all of you to this state, then we truly are lost." Harry returned his wand to its place and led Tonks to Gringotts ignoring the stares and whispers that grew around him.

They entered the bank with two goblins bowing him in and another inside the bank waving him back allowing Harry to avoid the lines completely. A few people inside the bank watched as Harry move passed them. They seemed captivated by his presence far more than ever before for some reason.

“What are they on about?” Harry asked Tonks and Griphook who joined them just inside the gilded doors.

“I believe that you have missed the Daily Prophet today, Harry?” Griphook asked.

“Yeah, I missed that one,” Harry answered. “Anything good in there for a change?”

“Only if you follow stocks and business,” Griphook said as he grinned the evil smile that all goblins seemed to possess. On Harry’s visible confusion, he elaborated. “Aside from the rumours about mass killings and other Death Eater activity, your recent acquisitions have made news. The reasoning behind your actions has been printed but the information did not come from us, I assure you.”

“It wouldn’t be that hard to figure out would it?” Tonks asked. “If you really looked at what was going on you could figure it out, right?”

“If you had a keen mind for business and its inner workings,” Griphook pondered out loud, “maybe.” They were directed passed two guards and goblin security on the double doors to find an impressive office. It had a large table in rich wood surrounded by chairs with a matching desk and high-backed chair behind it. On the table were piles of papers and other documents.

“Griphook?” Harry asked not sure what was going on.

“Harry, you are here to affirm our activity on your behalf,” Griphook said before being cut off by the doors opening again allowing Ragnok access the room.

“Ragnok,” Harry spoke warmly. “Pleasure to see you again.” Harry shook the goblin’s hand and assisted him into one of the seats at the large table.

“As I have grown accustomed,” Ragnok greeted, “I look forward to our meetings, Harry. I need you to authorize our purchases of the last few days. We only have one week to approve them before they are statutorily rejected. It is a carry over of old times, but it is merely a

formality. I can explain each and every transaction if you want or I can give you the highlights. Which would you prefer?”

Harry didn't need to think about it before giving his answer, “Highlights please.”

“Excellent,” Ragnok replied as he pushed the largest pile of papers away and pulled the smaller stack closer. “In summation, the entire Black Family inheritance was depleted to acquire what you asked us to carry out. We also made noticeable inroads into the Potter Family account as well. The stocks took an initial hit from the aggressive purchasing pattern we initiated, but many bounced back once news of your involvement became public knowledge.

“The boards of the affected companies are notified when a purchase of more than one percent of the total corporate shares are made by one person.” Ragnok smiled as he hesitated for a few seconds. “I have never received more owls in one day than I did on any of the days between Friday and today. Most executives saw their controlling five to ten percent of ownership disappear into nothingness as you added thousands of shares to your portfolio. I have a list of the companies where you own a controlling stake and are required to attend their board meetings or select a designate in your stead.” Ragnok slid the list across the table to Harry smiling the entire time.

“I also have a list of those companies where you own more than fifty percent of the shares.” Ragnok laughed an evil laugh after telling Harry that. “Since you most likely are unsure what that means, I will tell you. Having that many shares makes you not only a controlling owner, but the majority owner. Even if every other shareholder disagreed with you on a vote, you would still win. Essentially, you can direct the company in whatever direction you wish.

“Many of these companies are in questionable industries with equally questionable products or practices. I will tell you that they tend to have some of the highest rates of return though. Financially, it would be best to leave them as is until you earn back enough money to become as stable as you once were. Don't get me wrong by thinking that you aren't stable now, but you are a distance from being as secure as you were before this spending spree.

“In five to ten years you should have regained about thirty percent of your expenditures. Patience is the key to investing, Harry. The complete list is here,” Ragnok slid another list towards Harry smiling the whole time as well. “I can tell you that after the darker holdings, you have many perfectly legitimate companies firmly in your portfolio. The International Broom Company, makers of the Firebolt line and other specialized brooms, and the Cleansweep Broom Company are two of the more famous and profitable ones considering the cost to profit ratio involved in production. You have considerable stakes in a potion supply company, a Wizarding publisher, a muggle book seller, three muggle petroleum companies, an auto manufacturer, and a series of shops scattered about the world.”

“What do you mean by a considerable stake?” Harry asked while looking over the list. His eyes popped out as he saw a few of the names printed on the sheet.

Ragnok folded his hands before answering. “Considerable means a respectable voting share. Nothing as arrogant as forty percent or more but nothing as weak as one percent. You seem to be at five to twenty percent ownership for at least twenty different companies.”

Harry continued through the magical list before scanning the muggle one. He stopped dead when he saw a name that he had figured was long behind him. “Grunnings?”

Ragnok tapped his fingers together in thought. “Yes, Grunnings. If I remember correctly, a muggle company of some sort involving drills. Your fifteen percent share of the business came from the Potter side of things. It was purchased during a market downturn years ago. I believe the infusion of money propped up the company enough so it could survive the lull in business. I have no idea why the purchase was made nor why it has been kept for so long. The company has a lower rate of return than most of the others in the portfolio too. There is, however, a sealed document attached to the purchase agreement. Only a family member can break the seal on our side and the muggles haven’t been forthcoming on the terms despite our requests for clarification.”

"My uncle works there," Harry said not knowing why his father or maybe his mum would have helped the company Vernon worked at. *'Maybe this is why they took care of me? No, Vernon would have tried to get to the shares years ago if he knew about them.'* "I have no idea why they did that, but there must have been a good reason."

"Of the Potter history of investments, that purchase makes the least sense," Ragnok explained while shaking his head. "If you wish to dissolve your involvement in the company, tell me and it will be taken care of immediately. The papers will find out who made these purchases, Harry. Once the fervor over the escape dies down, they will check their backlog of stories and this massive financial shift will not go unnoticed even by those fools at the Prophet. Please be aware that it will happen sooner or later."

"Will they know about all of them?" Harry asked while he slid his hand into Tonks' under the table.

"Some were hidden to all but the board members, but enough of them were publicly handled as usual." Ragnok shook his head, "You know the Prophet only needs a few examples before printing that you did all of them. Fact has always been of the lowest priority to them. Shopkeepers will treat you differently when they find out. They will give you free items as fast as you can take them. They will hope for a snapshot of you holding their product to be printed." Ragnok laughed before adding, "As if it wasn't bad enough before, you will be the businessman's best friend now."

"Why?" Harry asked looking rather sick.

Ragnok waved his aged hand at the lists of companies Harry owned. "You have access to nearly every stage of production here. From the raw materials coming out of your mines or mills, to the design or invention stage from some of your firms, to the finished product and distribution of the items your companies make. Any business would have an edge over the others if you were to help them out. You are effectively a conglomerate of your own with links to most industries. I am very interested in learning how to leverage your influence on these businesses to maximize your income. In the last few days, I have been helping Griphook learn the delicacies of this kind of

venture. If this is done correctly, you could make your investment back in a few years should the market keep improving.”

“Um,” Harry stalled as he turned to Tonks wearing a lost look. “What do you need from me? You can do what ever you think is best at this point as long as the money doesn’t get into Voldemort’s hands.”

Ragnok chuckled before signaling to Griphook. The younger goblin leaned over and placed a box on the table. Ragnok opened a bottle of ink and produced a normal looking quill before sliding them towards Harry. “I simply need you to sign these documents affirming our work over the last few days. I know it is a tedious task, but only you can do it. I will leave you to it then.”

Ragnok and Griphook left the room to Harry and Tonks as they stared at the box. Tonks removed the lid and laughed. “What?” Harry asked knowing he wasn’t going to like answer.

“It is full, Harry,” Tonks smirked. “Hope your hand is well rested, dear.”

With a sigh, Harry grabbed the quill and dipped it in the ink well. “Bloody hell.”

On Tuesday Harry and Tonks worked with Team Two some more and more often than not they were combined missions. Harry’s team took up the support role while Harry and Thor usually made entry into the buildings or structures they were assaulting. Harry learned a lot of spells designed to force enemies to seek cover and a few new offensive ones.

As warned, Thor seemed eager to take Ceps under his wing and teach him all he knew about attacking and winning. The day was filled with aggressive magic and debris flying all over the training room. Harry spent two short stints in Medical to repair a cracked rib and a gash on his right leg, but he always hurried back to learn more from Horace and Team Two. Horace told them near the end of the day that they would be required to come in on Wednesday, early in the evening, for a mission they had been assigned. No details were given other than an order to resume their training.

As the lessons ended, Harry and Tonks Apparated back to Potter Estate to plan for the next day. Harry had yet to open his Hogwarts' letter and Tonks couldn't help but bounce in place in expectation of him opening it.

"Come on," Tonks whined. "Open it already. Troll or not, I will still kiss you." Tonks proved her word by snogging Harry until he fell over the arm of the couch causing them to land in a pile on top of each other. "Open it or you won't get to play with my breasts tonight. It is that simple."

"Are you threatening me?" Harry asked while cocking his eyebrow in challenge. Tonks met his eyes and never wavered. "You know that if you won't let me play with them I most likely won't do anything else with you." Harry watched as Tonks' expression cracked for a second before she tried to recover from it.

"Umm," Tonks bit her lower lip slightly. "That is a terrible thing to say, Harry. How can you be so cruel to me? I am hopelessly cute and endlessly playful. I can do that thing with my tongue that you like so much." Putting on her best pout, Tonks gazed into Harry's eyes. "You wouldn't do that to me, would you?"

Harry held his position and looked into her eyes for a few seconds. "I can and I will, Nymphadora." Harry slipped into Tonks willing mind and let her essence creep into his. "You aren't serious, Nymph. I know you aren't just like you haven't been all the other times." Harry desperately hoped his interpretation was correct and Tonks was just kidding again like she had been the many times before.

"You know me too well, Harry. I can't get enough of you and that, good sir, is my only weakness."

"Except for stairs," Harry added playfully counting off his fingers. "Runners, curbs, cloaks some of the time, the covers after a really good..."

"Hush you," Tonks scolded him before planting a warm kiss on his lips. She held it for a few minutes allowing her tongue to explore his wanting mouth. "Now, open that letter so we can plan for tomorrow. I have a few things I might want to get." Tonks' wink and flutter of a

laugh sent Harry into a mental spin as his mind tried to figure out what she meant and how that could affect him.

Harry was distracted from his increasingly wild thoughts by Tonks flipping the letter onto his chest. He kept seeing the same thing in her eyes when she was relaxed or being playful. He wasn't sure what it was, but he knew he liked it all the same. "Fine, I will open it just to make you happy."

Tonks quickly slid off of his chest and into a sitting position. She beamed at him and watched the letter intently. Harry sat up and picked up the letter. Next to the first letter that he had ever received, the letter in his hands meant the most. His entire future at Hogwarts depended on the grades he got on his OWLs. He hesitated before opening the envelope and Tonks gave him a muffled whimper to urge him on.

With a painfully slow motion, Harry drug out the letter opening process earning himself a few more whimpers from Tonks and a couple of pouts. "Why are you so anxious?"

"It is not every day that I get to see an OWL letter opened," Tonks answered trying to look into the envelope. "Oh hurry up."

Harry couldn't help but slow down. "I will get to it when I get to it, Nymph." Harry relished in how Tonks fretted and pouted at him. She really wanted to see the results and her hair began changing colours without her consciously doing it. "Your hair is visiting a carnival, Nymph."

Tonks looked up and saw the colours rotating wildly. She looked back at Harry and smirked. "It will go back to normal when you finally open that bloody letter."

Harry laughed and finished breaking the seal on the letter. He discarded the outer cover and held the contents in his hand waiting for Tonks to return to normal. She closed her eyes and her hair changed back. "Now, read it off and no dragging it out or you will get it."

Harry chuckled at the serious look Tonks gave him. He laughed even more when her lips twitched fighting her own laughter. The contest lasted until Tonks gave in and kissed Harry firmly. In a throaty growl, she told him to open the letter so they could make plans and then run upstairs to have fun. Swallowing deeply, Harry flipped open the letter and read the scores without wasting an extra second.

OWL Results: Harry J. Potter

Astronomy – A

Care of Magical Creatures – E

Charms – E

Defence Against the Dark Arts – O

Divination – P

Herbology – E

History of Magic – D

Potions – E

Transfiguration – E

Total OWLs – 7 of 9, Congratulations

The following classes are available to you during the upcoming year:

NEWT level – *Care of Magical Creatures, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Transfiguration*

Standard level – *Astronomy, Potions*

Electives – *Ancient Runes, Apparition, Arithmancy, Business, Healing, Magical Languages, Muggle Studies, Politics*

You are required to carry a minimum of five classes at the beginning of the year and must maintain no less than four classes at all times.

“Professor McGonagall added in that not getting into Potions complicates my hope of becoming an auror, but she would be willing file a protest on my behalf if I want her to.”

“Do you want her to do that?” Tonks asked congratulating Harry with a kiss and rubbing her breasts against his arm. “Do you want to become a stuffy old auror when you kind of have the best of it as an Unspeakable? Besides, you can live off of your holdings unless everything goes downside-up.”

Harry thought about his choices. *‘Auror is a long shot at best considering Snape is a lying berk and I can’t learn anything from him in the first place. I should probably learn more about business since I guess I am into that whether I like it or not.’* “There is always Quidditch if I live long enough.”

Harry took a sound rapping on the head for his comment as Tonks struck him with her hand. “Don’t you ever talk like that, Harry.” Her eyes glistened as she stared him down. “Don’t even joke about it. You are going to live through this and that is the attitude you have to have. Do you hear me?”

Harry was completely shocked by how Tonks reacted to his flippant comment. “I was only trying to be honest, Nymph.”

“If you were honest,” Tonks corrected wagging her finger at him, “you would say that you are going to become the best Quidditch player this country has ever had. You are going to take England to the World Cup and win it a few times. I never want to hear you talk about your death like that again. Do you hear me?” The last was whispered so softly Harry found himself leaning forward to hear her.

He pulled Tonks into a hug and kissed her head. “I hear you and I am sorry. I won’t joke about it again. I have never really had much of a future to consider before now. This is all new to me and I am a little scared. Of course I will deny that if you ever bring it up. I am Harry Potter after all and I am scared of nothing.” Harry puffed out his chest trying to get a laugh out of Tonks.

It worked as she laughed into his neck and ran her hand down his chest. Harry followed up the pleasant action by trailing kisses down

her forehead and temple to her neck and the hollow of her collarbone. Harry kept kissing for a few minutes until Tonks cooed softly and relaxed into his efforts. Deciding to be mean, Harry pulled back and brightly asked, "So what classes should I take?"

Tonks groaned and smacked him on the arm. "You will suffer for that one, Potter. I promise you that." She stared him down before looking over the list of classes to choose from. "Potions, Divination, and History of Magic should do you well along with Healing, Herbology, and Politics. There, that makes six classes and a solid year for you."

Harry looked at Tonks like she had turned into Voldemort himself. "You have got to be daft. I hate most of those classes and am no good in the others. Are you joking?"

Harry watched as Tonks' serious appearance slowly cracked under the pressure. Before she outright laughed, she said, "Stop when I am getting going will you? This is only a taste of what you can expect, Harry."

Harry shook his head and laughed. "I was only teasing. You know I will make good on my promises later, but this is important. A lot depends on this. I don't want to stuff it up before I even get going."

"Oh, Harry this is so easy," Tonks chided. She scanned the list quickly before offering her real opinion. "Defence, Charms, Transfiguration, Magical Creatures, Apparition since you can test out of it now, Business, and Politics would be the best ones to sign up for."

"But," Harry whined, "I hate Politics. I am no good at it, not even close."

"You have been doing it all summer long, Harry. Amelia, Ragnok, Horace, Jones for that matter, Dumbledore, and Fudge; are all examples of your political savvy."

"You have got to be touched in the head to think that! I hurt Jones and Horace. I argued with Dumbledore and befriended Ragnok. Amelia was just being in the right place at the right time. Fudge was

just telling people what they needed to hear. There wasn't an ounce of politics to it."

Tonks simply looked at Harry as if he was little child that couldn't figure out how to put on his own shoes. "Right place right time, befriending, use of force, talking or arguing...sounds like politics to me, Harry. You really don't know what you can accomplish do you? My you need a lot of work. Good thing you have an amazing girlfriend like me to mold you into something otherwise you could end up being some dodgy git with a complex."

Harry sighed as Tonks leaned in closer. She moved to sit on his lap as he looked over the form. Tonks unbuttoned his top button and walked her fingers around his chest before repeating the action to the second button. Harry Summoned a quill and marked the ones he decided to take. With a careless flick, Harry chuckled the quill and the form over his shoulder and buried his mouth into Tonks' neck resuming his activities from before.

Her shrieks of enjoyment sounded through the house as Harry lifted her into his arms and carried her up the stairs. By the time the bedroom door closed, Tonks shirt was falling down her arms to the floor and Harry's mouth was firmly ensconced in her mounds. Harry closed the door with a kick of his foot.

Wednesday dawned as Harry pulled his head out of the spot between Tonks' head and shoulder. A deep breath awoke her enough that she reached out and pulled Harry back into place. A hug followed that had Harry feeling safe and secure in her arms. He didn't know how she managed it with such a simple act, but time and time again Tonks made Harry feel safe and very welcome.

"You were the one wanting to go shopping so bad," Harry quipped.

"We have a mission tonight and it could be a long one. There is no reason to get up so early. Now, we are having a lie in and that is that."

Harry placed a kiss on the back of Tonks' shoulder allowing his hand to roam under the sheets and over her naked body. "If you insist, Nymphadora Tonks."

In a soft but throaty sigh, Tonks breathed, "I insist, Harry."

Harry awoke from a relaxed sleep that had been aided by the enjoyable exhaustion that Tonks helped him achieve. He felt soft fingers trailing along his chest and heard an equally soft hum coming from the woman sharing his bed. "How long have you been up?"

Tonks giggled and kissed his chest. "Not as long as you, but that wasn't what you were really asking was it?" Harry felt the heat wash over him as Tonks laughed causing her nipples to brush his side. "I can still make you blush, Harry. Never forget I will always have that over you."

"Need I mention what I can do to you?" Harry asked hinting at a few things he had found that drove her crazy.

"No need, Harry," Tonks submitted easily. "It is nearly noon so we should be going so we can get everything taken care of before Horace expects us in."

Tonks tried to slide out of the bed, but Harry held her to him tightly. He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. He focused on the scent and the feel of her before letting his arms relax. "Alright, I guess we should go."

After two quick showers, Harry found his completed form in the living room. He sealed it with wax and sent it off with Hedwig who soared out of the open window in the kitchen. He deposited his school letter in his cloak pocket before grasping Tonks' hand. With a smile and a wink, Harry Apparated them to the alley next to the Leaky Cauldron. With a few fun-filled steps, Tonks and Harry stumbled into the pub on their way to the back and the entrance for the alley.

Harry found himself to be quite the spectacle as he moved through the bustling pub. There were kids scattered about along with their parents in addition to the normal patrons. What struck Harry odd was that even some of the people he knew from school followed his movements as if he was a first year again. "What are they on about now?" Harry saw Ernie Macmillan in the corner of the pub eating lunch with an averaged sized woman and a little boy that looked

frighteningly like Ernie. "Hey, Ernie," Harry called out ignoring those who quieted to hear what he had to say.

Harry and Tonks walked over to Ernie and most likely his mum and brother. "Ernie, what is going on around here?" Harry asked gesturing to the room who still watched Harry intently.

"Oh, hi Harry," Ernie said as if he hadn't been watching Harry as well. "Great seeing you again. Had a good summer?"

Harry eyed him carefully wondering if he was ill or something. When he saw the little boy almost wetting himself as he quivered in his seat and tugging on Ernie's sleeve, Harry took a guess. "You must be Ernie's brother. Pleasure to meet you."

"Jimmy," the titchy boy mumbled as he shook Harry's hand like it was made of very fragile glass. "You're Harry Potter?"

"Right in one," Harry humoured him. "So, care to tell me why everyone is acting like they are? It is not like they haven't seen me before."

"Um, well Harry, it's like this..." Ernie paused. "Haven't read the Prophet today, have you?"

"No," Harry responded knowing he wasn't going to like the answer. "I gave it up for summer. What rubbish have they been writing about me this time? Haven't checked into the mental ward at Mungo's, have I? That would be a shock to more than a few I can tell you."

Ernie laughed nervously and checked over his shoulder before leaning in close and speaking just loud enough for his table to hear him. "They said you went off and bought up most the Wizarding world. I always figured you had some money, but..." Ernie stopped when Harry sighed and looked to Tonks.

"I guess the escape news wasn't captivating enough," Harry rubbed his face in frustration. "What else have they been saying?" Harry looked up to see Ernie openly gaping at him as if he was a spectacle on some low-budget sideshow. "What now?"

"You mean it is true?" Ernie gasped.

"I made a few purchases," Harry defended. "But it was only to get the Death Eaters out of the companies so their money would be out in the open again. I asked Amelia to seize it, but I haven't heard what happened with that idea."

"You mean Minister Bones?" Ernie asked and received a simple nod in return. "So did you threaten Fudge at the Ministry and toss him out too?"

"I wouldn't go that far," Harry tried to put the picture into perspective. "I did challenge his abilities and question his motives. I guess I insulted him too, but I couldn't help myself on that one. He makes it so easy sometimes." Harry looked up to see Tonks smiling at him and Ernie still imitating a fish. His mum had the presence of mind to fight her urge to gawk, but she did a poor job on it while Jimmy merely stared with open awe.

"That was true too?" Ernie looked to his mum for some help and found none. "They also had an article about you challenging all of Diagon Alley and You-Know-Who."

"At least they have gotten most of the high points accurate enough even for them," Harry commented to Tonks. "It wasn't like I called Voldemort out for a duel or anything." Harry jumped at the sharp gasp of breath Ernie's mum took in and the stifled shriek from Jimmy. "Oh, it is just a made up name. Quit being scared of only a name. Now the real thing is kind of frightening, but the name is just a name."

With a revered gaze, Ernie spoke. "Says the man who slays dragons, fights Dementors, and breaks into the Ministry while managing to avoid every teacher in the process."

"There was only one dragon," Harry said firmly while quietly slipping in, "a couple different times. I will give you the Dementors though, but I never broke into the Ministry. I simply walked in. The door was open I tell you and there were no guards."

"Only a dozen Death Eaters and *Him*," Tonks added nudging Harry in the shoulder. She glowed as Harry nodded to the truth she mentioned.

"I just get lucky, Ernie, nothing more," Harry said and was rewarded with a smack to the head. "Some would disagree with me on that though."

"As much as I wish I could be as strong as you, Harry, I think I would do better just being me." Ernie looked to his mum and found her smiling at him like most mums would when they heard their child was satisfied with who they were.

Harry stood and Tonks followed. "Being me isn't all it is cracked up to be. See you on the train." Harry and Tonks made their way through the crowds with quite a bit of ease since most people moved aside for Harry if they saw him coming and everyone did.

The last thing Harry heard as he opened the door to the rear alley was Jimmy shouting, "You really do know him. You weren't lying to me." Harry drew his wand and tapped the proper bricks revealing the entrance to Diagon Alley. What Harry saw was an alley filled to the brim with people bumping into each other at every turn. Children ran in and out of adults whose arms were laden with bags and books and animals.

"Is it Hogwarts' letter day or something?" Harry asked Tonks.

"No idea, Harry. Remember I spend all my time with you. I am not all that connected to the real world right now what with living in Potter Fantasy Land and all."

"Hey that is my home you are besmirching. You would do well to remember that Jules sleeps all alone in the stable. I am sure she would love to have company."

Tonks shuddered with images of the griffin and her making *'nice'*. "You wouldn't dare do that to me. You aren't evil enough for that kind of treatment."

Harry laughed and led the way to Flourish & Blotts. He received the same kind of treatment from the alley patrons as the ones in the Leaky Cauldron. Many moved out of his way as if he was some celebrity who was better than them or a leper that couldn't be touched for fear of life and limb. Harry did his best to ignore both kinds.

He waved to his friends from school and kept an eye out for potential threats. Tonks did the same and counted the number of aurors in the crowd. She was surprised by the number of them patrolling the alley. "Harry, we are surrounded by aurors. If anything happens, the crossfire situation would be atrocious."

"Let us hope nothing happens then," Harry sighed as he looked over the crowd too. He spotted the auror cloaks easily enough and the wandering eyes of normally dressed people scanning for threats. "Bit of everything here today, huh?"

They entered the book seller with a very specific list of books they needed to get before they could leave. Harry found the next book for NEWT level Defence. In the same section, Harry saw a few books that normally would have peaked his interest, but they failed to appeal to him in the same way. He knew many of them wouldn't have the right spells to use against groups of people or an enemy willing to do anything.

As those thoughts swam in his mind, Harry wondered if he was becoming like those he fought against. Did they think what spells would kill the most people? Did they ponder the effects of a well placed Reductor Curse as opposed to a Cutting spell? Harry grew more confused as he stood in the aisle holding the book for another year of Defence at Hogwarts. "What criminal element are we going to be exposed to this time? Vampire maybe? How about a banshee, we haven't had one of those yet."

"Don't you want someone that you can learn from and not worry about them trying to kill you?" Tonks asked appalled at Harry's attitude.

"With the exception of Remus, they have all tried to kill me at one point or another and learning from them is second to that. Either way I guess I could do Dumbledore's Army again, but I think I will have to change the name first. I am not his solidier any longer."

They moved around the shop picking out the books Harry needed for Charms, Transfiguration, Business, and Politics. Harry skipped the Apparition text since it was redundant and Care of Magical Creatures used the two books from fourth and fifth year for the NEWT level

class. With Harry's arms nicely weighed down with books, they made their way to the teller stand. They stood in the long line and crept forward as people paid and left.

When Harry reached the front, one of the clerks saw him and went quiet before calling a manager over. Harry watched as the man stumbled over himself apologizing for making Harry wait in line. Harry just shook his head in response trying to end the scene playing out in front of him. Fed up with the fuss, Harry asked, "How much?"

Harry's frustration grew as the manager refused to take Harry's money. "You are a partner in our business. Your money is no good here."

Harry attempted to keep his calm but he was failing as fast as the seconds ticked by. Reaching his limit, Harry dumped his books into a provided bag and set a handful of galleons on the counter. "For the next person since you won't take my money." Harry turned and left the store grumbling about arse-kissing sales people and managers grabbing at those who might be able to help them out in life.

"Bad taste in your mouth, Harry?" Tonks asked watching Harry deal with his frustration at being who he was in public.

"Yes." Harry kept his desire to return to the store and curse the manager in check as Tonks led him to Florean Fortescue's. She sat him down in a seat looking out on the busy alley before she went inside for ice cream. Harry settled his angry thoughts as he watched parents and children hurry about. The noise was a welcomed distraction from his surreal life. The hustle and bustle of people moving around him allowed Harry a rare moment to be himself and go relatively unnoticed by most people.

He happily watched the world pass him by with no shouts of death threats or curses against him. A small smile spread across his face as he thought about the last few weeks and how much better it had been than all the others combined. He thought about Tonks and how important she had been in the summer being so pleasant.

"Dreaming about your near-future death, Potter," called a familiar voice.

Harry sighed and let his memories slide back behind his mental barrier just in case. "Actually I am patiently waiting for the day that your Death Eater father receives the Dementor's Kiss right before Voldemort gets his." Harry smiled evilly as he turned his head to spy Draco and his friends cringing from the easy mention of the Dark Lord's name. "Even you are afraid of the name. Tut tut, Malfoy. I expected better from you at least."

"Joke while you can Potter," Malfoy eased out with practiced intimidation. "You know things are only going to be worse now that the Ministry has misplaced a few people. They might even show up at your house or maybe your friends' houses."

"You are far too weak at intimidation to scare me, Malfoy," Harry drolled on as if he was bored. "And you are showing exactly how out-of-touch you really are. Voldemort has already tried to get quite a few of my friends this summer and he has failed each and every time. Sad really, but what could you expect from a half-blood like him. His father was a muggle through and through. Seems like misplaced hatred from his childhood to me, but I am not a psychologist so I can't be sure."

"It is bad enough you speak *His* name as if *He* isn't the strongest person to ever live, but you further insult *Him* with your lies," Malfoy seethed glaring at Harry as he casually watched the Slytherin and the two goons behind him.

"I can and will insult the Dark Tosser whenever it seems prudent. Please take your insults and your threats and leave me in peace," Harry dismissed Malfoy with a wave. "You have monopolized enough of my Wednesday so be off with you."

"Or you will what, Potter?" Malfoy challenged. "Attack me in front of an alley full of people who think you walk on water? Might damage your golden-boy appearance."

"I have no concern for what they think of me, Malfoy," Harry kept his casual appearance but readied for something to go wrong. "Now, please leave. Your puttering about has interrupted an otherwise superb day."

“Problems, Harry?” Tonks asked as she set the ice cream down on their table.

“Nothing that I haven’t dealt with many times before, Tonks.”

“Well well if it isn’t my disowned slut of a cousin,” Malfoy said never noticing how close he came to losing his head.

Harry had drawn his wand and been half way through casting the Severing Ribbon spell when Tonks placed her hand on his wand hand to stop Harry from bringing it into view out from underneath the table.

“You could only wish to know all the things you think you know, Draco,” Tonks said as silkily as any Malfoy could have accomplished. “How is your father these days? I heard he has gone rather feral and got himself hurt during his last escapade.”

Draco eyed her carefully. “What do you know of it?”

“I am an auror after all,” Tonks explained. “I have access to all of the reports filed by the department.”

“My father is fine and I haven’t seen him since before he was wrongly accused of being a Death Eater.” Malfoy looked around as he said the words. Either hoping the right people were listening or the wrong ones weren’t.

“Keep trying to convince yourself of that, Malfoy,” Harry added. “Now, again, please leave. I would hate to see you make a scene in the middle of Diagon Alley.”

“And how would I do that, Potter?”

“Why, by getting your arse kicked by me of course,” Harry said slowly without hesitation before taking a large bite of ice cream. “This is excellent, Tonks, thank you.”

Malfoy watched how calm Harry was and how effortless the comments were spoken. He felt his own body nearing failure as his

heart raced and his vision shrunk into tight focal points. Trying to get in the last word, Malfoy said, "*He* is going to come for you, Potter."

"And when he does, Malfoy, I will be sure to let you know how it ends up." Harry smirked before looking back to Tonks and striking up a conversation while completely ignoring Malfoy as he fumed in place from being soundly dismissed.

Harry looked at Tonks but kept his true focus on Malfoy the entire time. He watched the furious teen storm off with his goons trailing behind him. "Thank Merlin he left finally. I was beginning to wonder if I would have to curse him to get my point across or not."

"And you were the better man for not resorting to that," Tonks complimented.

"Still would have been a smashing good time though."

Harry and Tonks ate their ice cream in a surprising amount of anonymity. Harry still felt the eyes of passersby, but they didn't linger long enough to raise the alert. When they were finished, Harry led Tonks away from Diagon Alley and into the same small off shoot that led to the fancy restaurant they had eaten at weeks prior. Harry asked Tonks to wait for him at the door while he slipped inside for a few seconds.

When he returned, they wandered back to the Alley and Harry couldn't help but drift into Quality Quidditch Supplies with Tonks following close behind. Harry wandered the moderately busy shop looking at everything that was Quidditch. He saw new pads that he figured he would need for his seventh year since his current ones were starting to show their wear. A few new brooms hung in the front window like the Comet 320, Nimbus 3000, and the same display model Firebolt.

"Bugger, I thought they would have a new Firebolt out," Harry complained.

"Want a new one?" Tonks asked looking thoughtful.

"I would hate to keep using mine in case it gets destroyed like my Nimbus did. Sirius got me that broom and I think I should try to keep it safe or something."

"Getting sentimental in your old age, Harry?" Tonks asked laughing at his reaction which was trying to hide his head.

Harry recovered quickly and held his head high. "Speaking of old..." Harry slid his eyes from the 320 to Tonks and smirked.

"Life in your own hands, Harry, in your own hands," Tonks said as she patted the pocket she kept her wand in. In response, Harry lifted his eyebrows accepting her threat happily.

They continued perusing until Harry was cornered by the shopkeeper. "You seem to have an eye for brooms, Mr.?" The man looked closely at Harry for a second before realizing who it was. Harry held his hand out in a quick attempt to still the man's imminent outcry.

"Pleasure," Harry hurried on trying to distract the man. "I was looking for something to replace my Firebolt. I wish to protect it from damage. It has sentimental value." Harry said the last giving Tonks a glare.

"I am sorry, Mr..." Harry stopped the man from saying his name out loud. "The Firebolt is the fastest broom out right now. It is rare that anyone can afford a top-of-the-range broom that isn't being sponsored by a professional Quidditch team. Why I still remember the day I sold that very Firebolt you speak of. It was the only one I sold to a private citizen albeit anonymously."

"Nothing better, huh," Harry said looking discouraged. "I guess I will just have to keep using it then. Well, we should be going. Thank you for your help, sir."

Harry and Tonks left the store and traveled to Eeylops Owl Emporium to pick up a package of owl treats for Hedwig. Harry had been running low and knew that she would be quite cross with him if he ran out. "Can't forget these or I will be hated for weeks."

"Still wrapped around Hedwig's talon I see," Tonks chided in good humour.

When they left the Emporium, Tonks led Harry to Madam Malkin's. "Um, I have enough clothes, thanks."

"Who said I am looking for you, Harry." Tonks stated depositing Harry into a chair near the back of the store before disappearing for a few minutes. Harry spent his time working on his Occlumency skills since he had time to kill. Tonks returned with a moderate bulge in her cloak and a coy smile on her face.

When they left the clothiers, Tonks got a weird feeling and hurried Harry through the fading crowd and back to the Leaky Cauldron. She urged him forward and out into muggle London so they could Apparate away safely.

"Care to explain all that, Nymph?" Harry asked.

"Bad feeling is all, nothing for sure. Did you feel anything that was off?"

Harry thought about it but shook his head. "Nothing stands out. Maybe you were overacting?"

"Maybe," Tonks relented but didn't look all too confident.

After a nice meal prepared by Tiki with Dobby's help, whether it was wanted or not, Harry and Tonks arrived at the Ministry in their cloaks and ready to carry out whatever they were asked to do.

They entered the training room and were quickly rounded up into the briefing being led by Horace who looked more relaxed than normal when an assignment was given. "Team One has been on scene for a couple days rotating out with Team Six as needed. We have chosen our target based on its significance, visibility, and for the sheer fact that we know the sodding owner is a fucking Death Eater who has, until recently, stayed out of our grasps.

"With the Ministry protective circle broken, we will be traveling to Wiltshire tonight to execute what I hope is a thoroughly destructive investigation and apprehension. The coordinates are listed on the board behind me so memorize them. We will have to travel the remaining distance on foot since the wards protecting the target are

quite strong and have triggers built in to them to alert the occupants should an attempt to temper with them fails.

“As is common with most aristocratic nobs, they have layered their wards in the most arrogant way. They left the Repelling wards on the outside of the triggers so those wards have been down for days already. Merlin, I live for this kind of thing. We will strike on two fronts. Team Two from the front and Team Three from the rear. Team One will monitor the perimeter for any escaping targets and they will try to escape. We have reports of hidden tunnels leading away from the target and that is where One comes into play.

“They will attack and subdue who they can. If the enemy resist, they will be struck down. Two and Three, be aware that there is most likely a couple of non-targets inside the objective and may fight back in due course. Your goal is to subdue them but not kill them unless they act on it first. We are hoping to reacquire a few lost souls who were going to be founts of intel for the war effort. As such, we want prisoners, Thor. I know your life is important to you, but perhaps your tolerance for danger can be elevated for one night.

“Watch your wand tip since the other team will be coming in from the other side. I do not want to receive a message stating that we offed one of our own. I will be extremely cross towards all of you if that happens. Now, prepare a working strategy then Apparate in and let’s get a few of our Death Eaters back. They have been on holiday long enough.” Horace clapped his hands together before walking off looking very buoyant.

“Did he get knocked in the head recently?” Harry asked Tonks but loud enough that Thor heard him.

“Nah, he just loves this sort of thing,” Thor explained. “Horace loves sticking it to the better-than-you crowd. If I am not mistaken, this should be a wonderful mission even if we come up blank. Nothing like trashing another’s home and not having to fix it up afterwards.”

“Remind me never to have you over for a party,” Harry quipped jokingly thinking of the scolding he would get at the hands of Tiki and Paul not to mention what Jules would do to the guests if she had the chance.

Harry and Robeen gathered together for a few minutes to figure out a simple plan of timing and coverage areas when they breeched the target's defenses. Both teams traveled to the coordinates in Wiltshire and walked the remaining way to meet up with Gillian. They gathered near the border of the property line and well away from the last wards protecting the building which was an old estate home sporting firm stone blocks and ivy dangling from every surface. A couple of towers loomed over the squarish structure adding more height to everything. Stained glass cast an almost soft glow to the home that accommodated killers.

Harry watched the ancient trees surrounding the home move with the light breeze that also teased the grass beneath them. The house was nice but there was a feeling filth that seemed to exude from it tainting everything that it came in contact with. Harry forced himself to focus on the matter at hand and participated in the briefing.

The assault seemed simple enough with Two hitting the front and Three hitting the rear simultaneously. One would put up wards to stop the targets from escaping and keep them inside the house for the other two teams to finish them off. Harry and his team knew what they had to do and they seemed ready to accomplish it as they snuck around to the rear of the property.

Harry looked around the property and saw a small shed near the tree line on the edge of the manicured lawn, a stone bench near a small fountain, and rows of flowerbeds. Team Three moved together and took up a triangle formation waiting for the appointed time. Harry knew Gillian and her team would take down the last of the wards and put up their own in quick succession. He also knew Cal would lag behind to cover them as he and Tonks entered the rear door while at the same time Robeen and his people stormed the front.

Harry knew he had to sweep through the ground floor quickly because Robeen was taking the upper floors. He had to prevent anyone from escaping while keeping the innocents from getting hurt. The thing was, Harry had no idea who he was going up against or who the innocents were. Finally, the time came and Harry saw a faint flicker of a ward being taken down.

He readied his spells and the approach they were going to take. He visualized sneaking up to the house and entering the rear door quietly and undetected. Harry was startled out of his mental preparation by a loud gonging sound. A message spell struck him seconds later as he hurried his team forward. *'Stuffed it. Go!'*

Harry broke into a run as he pulled ahead of his team. He raised his wand and launched two Reductor Curses at the door one wandless, one wandless. The force of the spells obliterated the door and most the frame holding it in place. Bits and pieces erupted into the home as Harry sprinted through the unobstructed doorway. Once inside, Harry scanned the kitchen and dining room finding nothing.

Tonks took a hallway to the left and cleared the cupboards and a loo before they both advanced down parallel hallways leading to the foyer. Harry caught movement out of the corner of his eye and fired a Stunner at the moving form. When Harry hurried towards it, he saw a small house elf, unconscious, who had been cowering under a chair. Following procedure, Harry bound the poor thing and moved on ignoring the guilt that flooded his mind.

He and Tonks teamed up again and swept into the drawing room. They met opposition in the form of a wand wielding Narcissa Malfoy. She got off a nasty looking pinkish spell before Harry started returning fire. He alternated between Stunners, Blasting Curses, and Expelliarmus. He destroyed most of the furniture and parts of the walls as Narcissa dove for cover behind a large statue off to the side of the room.

"Surrender or we will continue leveling this room," Harry shouted as Tonks circled to the left in an attempt to flank the woman.

"Fucking Ministry can't leave us alone," Narcissa yelled back following it with a Cutting Curse and the Entrail-Expelling Curse. "Get out now! You have no right to be here!"

Harry threw up an Imprimis shield and moved closer to Narcissa's position but further away from where Tonks was coming from. "Throw out your wand and you will not be harmed. Keep attacking us and you may. We have been authorized to enter your home to search for..."

Harry was cut off by another series of dangerous spells being launched at him by the only female Malfoy.

The curses were cut short when a flash of light struck the woman in the chest and laid her out. Harry moved ahead and swept the corners of the room searching for other targets as Tonks bound her relative with glee making the binds extra tight. "Clear," Harry called as he focused on the door and waited for Tonks to rejoin him before moving on to check an empty sitting room.

Harry saw the front door or what was left of it imbedded in the wall opposite of the doorway. Harry Levitated the elf into the drawing room and set her next to Narcissa while waiting for Team Two to finish with the upstairs. No yells or screams were heard, no spell work lit the hallways as far as could be seen from the first floor. When the three members appeared at the top of the stairs looking disappointed, Harry swore.

"Where is Draco? I know he is here somewhere?" Harry looked around for anything they could have missed during their search as the others descended the ornate and curving stairs. "The drawing room floor," Harry called out and hurried into the room.

He had just finished Levitating the elf out of the way and Banishing Narcissa into a corner when the others joined him. "What are you doing, Ceps?" Robeen asked.

"There is a hidden compartment under the floor in here."

"How do you know?" Joslin asked casting Revealing Charms around the room. "The aurors have been through the place and found nothing of the like."

"They aren't Malfoys for no reason," Harry replied giving up on the soft approach. He began firing Reductors into the floor starting underneath the couch first. The thing was, Harry didn't bother to move the couch before the first spell erupted from his wand. The lone, untouched item of furniture in the room exploded into unrecognizable remnants as Harry systematically repeated the action around the room.

Thor laughed as he watched Harry thrash the room. "Never invite me to a party, eh?" Thor had his laugh and joined in the fun.

It was Tonks who hit the hidden door in the floor revealing a tunnel below the room that was encased in stone. Harry was about to jump down when a series of Cutting Curses shot up from below.

"Bugger, that was close," Harry said as he pulled himself up off the floor. "Surrender now or we will attack!"

"Fuck off blood-traders," yelled back a familiar voice.

'Found Draco at least,' Harry thought. He watched as the spells continued to be fired from under the floor. They weren't aimed at anything so they traveled up to the ceiling tearing chunks from the stone and wood beams holding it up. "Enough of this," Harry yelled before acting.

"Accio Draco," Harry commanded and launched repeated Stunners at the mouth of the hole. When the shrill scream of Draco broke the plain of the floor, he was hit instantly by two in-flight Stunners from Harry. Harry bound the boy as he still flew through the air before crashing to the floor across the room. "Settled that."

"Thor, Joslin," Robeen commanded. "Clear that room."

Both Unspeakables moved to the edge of the hidden door when Harry yelped and sprinted to the doorway. "Cal!" Harry yelled as he left the room running as if his life was in danger and he was a normal person who ran from that sort of thing. Chamel chased after him with Robeen following them both.

Robeen saw Harry Banish a bench out of his way and completely through an adjacent wall to clear a path to the kitchen and ultimately outside. When Robeen caught up, he saw Harry attacking a group of three men in black robes who had pinned Cal behind the stone bench from the garden that had been overturned. Robeen fired a series of spells that seemed to get lost in the flood of magic Ceps was raining down upon them. Chamel had moved away from Ceps and into a position to cover any kind of retreat Cal would attempt. *'They have teamwork,'* Robeen thought.

Harry fired Reductors, Bone spells, and was lashing the Severing Ribbon around as if it was an extension of his own body. He attacked the two slower enemies first trying to worsen the odds for the last person. Harry dropped one with a Bone Breaking Curse to the shoulder who was bound by Robeen immediately.

Tonks attacked the quicker Death Eater trying to draw his focus away from Cal so he could retreat to a safer position. The maneuver worked and Cal was able to fall back to join Robeen and support Ceps' and Chamel's attack on the last two enemies that had been found.

Harry saw that Tonks was more than a match for the quicker opponent as she felled the man with a series of moderate spells that changed his visual orientation, increased the affect of gravity on him, and finally rendered him unconscious with a Bludgeoning Hex.

Harry continued his assault on his man by trying to move him into a place where the remaining Unspeakables could join in safely. When the man started retreating to the tree line, Harry let loose with repeated Bone spells followed by the Cruciatus Curse just long enough to land a Stunner. The scream was silenced in a wash of red light that gave Harry a chance to take a deep breath to ease his racing heartbeat.

"Cal, Chamel," Harry yelled out. "Alright?"

"I am fine, Ceps," Chamel answered binding all three again.

"Fine thanks to you, Ceps," Cal answered holding his left arm.

Harry saw how Cal was nursing his arm and moved to confront him. "What happened to your arm?"

"Less than what would have happened," Cal responded. "I am fine for now. Nothing a quick visit to Medical couldn't cure."

Harry was about to argue his point, but a noise behind him forced him into action again. Harry spun and localized the noise to be coming from the shed near the trees. He fired two Reductor Curses at it. Harry heard a yell and saw two figures dive to either side away from

the shed right before the spells connected. The sturdy looking shed exploded under the oppressive forces from the spells. Debris scattered in all directions and a few yelps could be heard from the taller grass surrounding the area where the shed had been.

“Ow.” “Shite that is going to leave a mark.” “Hold your fire, Ceps!”

“Thor, Joslin?” Robeen yelled as he lowered his wand from the perceived threat.

“Yeah,” Thor called out holding his wand above his head signaling his position. “That was our mistake. Should have announced our position prior to appearing.” Thor and Joslin stood up brushing dirt, grass, and bits of shed off their clothes. “The tunnel led us here after a small detour in a very interesting room filled with many illegal things.”

“I am sorry,” Harry apologized as he moved to help the two people he almost killed.

“No problem,” Joslin said. “We knew better, but when we heard all the excitement up here we kind of got ahead of ourselves. The bruises I am going to have are entirely my fault. At least it wasn’t one of your Crucios. That would have been downright vicious.”

Robeen, Tonks, and Harry Levitated the three enemies inside the home and deposited them in the drawing room next to the others. Harry looked over the collection of prisoners and didn’t see any innocents among them except for the house elf. When Gillian arrived, she took charge of the situation.

“These three will be sent to our holding cells and kept there,” Gillian said pointing her wand at Lucius, Crabbe senior, and Goyle senior. The wife and boy will be Obliviated and released once the Aurors and other Ministry personnel arrive and fix things up.”

“What about the house elf?” Harry asked.

“What would you liked done, Ceps?” Gillian queried with interest.

“Let’s free her so the Malfoys can’t keep abusing her.”

“How do you know they abuse her?” Thor asked with interest.

“Educated guess,” Harry said firmly.

“Do what you think is best, but remember the Imperius Curse can not be used to void a magical contract like the binding of a house elf to a family.”

Harry nodded his understanding before reviving the elf. He crouched down and watched the elf wake up. She shrieked and cowered away from the people in the grey cloaks all who had their wands out. “What is your name?” Harry asked kindly.

“Mora,” the elf managed to shuddered out more frightened than Dobby had ever been.

“Would you like to be free of the Malfoys?”

After much encouragement, the elf answered. “Master would never free Mora. Master needs Mora too much to stay hidden.”

“Well, *Master*, won’t be back again,” Harry informed her. “He is going with us and this is the only chance you have of getting away from him.”

“Where would Mora go then? Mora be lost and a free house elf.”

“Go to Hogwarts and speak to Dumbledore. He could help you. So, are you interested in my offer?”

Mora looked at her unconscious master and family. “Mora stolen from family and made to serve Master. Mora want out.”

Harry turned to Lucius and bound him again with ropes that cut deeply into his skin nearly drawing blood. He revived the Death Eater and waited for him to regain the ability to think. “The Dark Lord will kill you all.”

“Good to hear Voldemort hasn’t forgotten about us,” Harry said ignoring the gasps from his allies and the sneer from his enemy. “I have a deal for you, Malfoy.” Harry offered tapping his wand against

his hand in a way he had seen Voldemort do in the past. "Free Mora and I will allow Draco to remain intact."

Thor laughed out loud as Tonks looked on waiting to see what he meant. "What do you mean by that, Ministry stooge?"

Harry walked over to Draco and pointed his wand at his crotch. "Free her or I will end the Malfoy line here and now. I think it is a very beneficial deal for you actually."

Malfoy had the decency to look shocked as he strained against the tight ropes binding him. "You can't do that. You work for your precious Ministry. You would end up in Azkaban for it."

"Maybe, but the Malfoys will die with this pathetic excuse for an heir," Harry countered twitching his wand slightly.

"Actually," Gillian chimed in, "he wouldn't go to Azkaban. We are given greater latitude in our dealings with criminals. Besides, I am sure all of us will be busy doing something else when it happens so we will see nothing."

"Decide now," Harry ordered the blonde haired man.

After some thought, Lucius dropped his head in defeat to the idea of his family line ending on the ravaged floor of his drawing room. "Fuck you."

"At least we agree that she goes free?" Harry asked leaving little choice in the matter.

"Fine," Lucius barked. "Worthless servant anyway."

Harry removed Lucius' shoe and placed it in his hand. "Make it good, Lucius. I can always end your line if I am unsatisfied."

Lucius snarled at Harry and barked out Mora's name. "You are free you pathetic elf. Be gone from my home and never return." Mora took the shoe and hugged it.

“Thank you, sir,” Mora said before disappearing with a snap of her fingers.

“Excellent,” Harry said raising his wand and Stunning Lucius again. “I hate talking to that man.”

Gillian ordered Team Two to collect the three prisoners and take them to the holding cells. Before leaving, Thor clapped Harry on the back and laughed again. “Damn fine work, Ceps. Everyday I see more of myself in you, brilliant.”

With the numbers lessened by six, Gillian released Team Three from the scene and waited for the Ministry personnel to arrive.

Thursday and Friday was more training with Team Two. Horace was pleased with the outcome of the mission and pushed the two teams harder in an attempt to improve their functionality together. Improvements were made and Harry gained a lot of confidence in his abilities to manage his team and at the same time interact with another. Harry disappeared for an hour on Friday night up the tower stairs and refused to tell Tonks what he was up to.

On Saturday, Harry flew around on his broom during the morning. He chased the Snitch for hours keeping an eye on Tonks who had stayed on the ground to watch. Tonks on the other hand, kept an eye on Jules who had settled near the edge of the Quidditch Pitch. Harry flew down to Tonks every so often to kiss her or make her laugh.

When lunchtime arrived, they settled onto a thick blanket Dobby had provided for the picnic Harry had requested without Tonks knowing about it. They ate slowly and spent much of the time playing around. After they finished, they snogged for awhile before resting and watching the clouds drift by overhead.

“What is that one?” Harry asked.

“Um, a plimpy and a fish swimming together,” Tonks answered while slowly rubbing her hand up and down his chest “What is that one?”

“A beater getting ready to hit that Bludger at me,” Harry told her.

"That is the fifth Quidditch related cloud you have seen today. I think you are in a rut, Harry."

"Hey, I like my clouds and, rut, I guess."

"Yes, you do." Tonks said softly as she looked into Harry's eyes with that same weird look he had been seeing for days maybe even weeks. They spent until late in the afternoon kissing and just being together enjoying each other's company.

Sunday morning came along with breakfast and a host of correspondence arriving via Hedwig. Harry made sure to keep the letters away from Tonks while he read and destroyed them once he was finished. Tonks watched him carefully, but let him have his fun for the time being. After breakfast, Harry wanted to fly around a little more, but Tonks begged off tempting the fate that was Jules.

Once Harry was outside of the house, Tonks raced upstairs to confront Hedwig. When she found the owl, she was preening her feathers and looking to settle down for a nap. "Hedwig," Tonks called out trying to be friendly. In an effort to appease the bird, Tonks held her hand out containing treats.

The snowy owl eyed her carefully before nicking the treats one after the other in quick succession. "There, that is a good owl. Now, can you tell me where all those letters came from?" Tonks only got a blank look in return. "Oh, come on, Hedwig. I know you can answer questions. You do it for Harry all the time."

Not to be discouraged, Tonks tried to get ingenious. "How about you make a noise when I say the name of the person who sent them? Okay, ready, the Weasleys any of them?" Hedwig merely stared at the hopeful woman revealing nothing. "Oh come on now. Remus?"

The owl closed her eyes and tried to go to sleep. "Oh no you don't," Tonks told her. "I expect something for my effort here. Dumbledore?" Hedwig continued to ignore Tonks to the best of her ability. "Harry gets whole conversations and I get a stare and closed eyes. What a crock."

"And you give me a hard time for losing arguments with her," Harry's voice sounded in the room. Tonks spun around trying to hide her guilty look. She saw the man belonging to the voice hovering just outside the window. "Trying to ruin my surprise, Nymph?"

Tonks folded her arms and pouted as well as she could. "Please tell me?"

"That would ruin everything then," Harry told her hovering in through the window stopping in front of his girlfriend. "I can't have you ruining my plans. I spent a lot of time on this. Now, you leave Hedwig be so she can get a good night's sleep."

"It is the day, Harry," Tonks pointed out smirking.

"To owls it is night," Harry countered while pulling Tonks to him. They kissed lightly before things progressed as they usually did. Harry ended up carrying his broom down the stairs before setting it outside his bedroom door. Seconds later, Tiki appeared and returned the broom to where it belonged shaking her head the whole time.

Harry woke to Dobby nudging his shoulder. "Harry asked Dobby to tell him when it was five. It is five Harry."

"Thank you Dobby," Harry said making sure the sheet covered Tonks enough. When the elf left the room, Harry turned so he could lightly nibble on Tonks' ear. She purred at him until she woke up enough to remember her driving question for the day.

"What do you have planned, Harry?"

"Get dressed and you will find out, Nymphadora. And wear your nice robes, too." Harry slid out of the bed and pulled open the wardrobe trying to find the best robe to fit with his plans. Deciding on the deep red cloak with a nice shirt and pants that Tonks had picked out at the beginning of the summer seemed to fit perfectly for his plans.

When he was dressed and ready, Harry found Tonks still trying to choose between two robes to go with her black muggle dress. "Which one, Harry?"

"The left one," Harry answered knowing that things could go terribly wrong in the blink of an eye.

"Why not the right one?" Tonks asked holding both up trying to decide.

"Um, are you going to keep this up until I tell you where we are going?"

Tonks deflated some before blowing a breath out of her mouth. "Was I that transparent?" Harry tapped his head lightly but said nothing. "You didn't use it to figure me out, did you?"

Harry pointed to the left one and helped her into it. When they were ready, Harry led Tonks down the stairs and into the garage. He helped Tonks into the Jaguar before getting in himself. "Where are we going in a car, Harry?"

"Where ever we want, actually. Any ideas?"

"You are enjoying this aren't you?"

Harry smirked and leaned over to kiss Tonks. "Every second of it." Harry started the engine and revved it a few times before pulling out of the garage and leaving the grounds after the normal inspection from Jules. Harry drove beyond the wards before pulling over and stopping. Tonks eyed him closely when he pulled out a scrap of paper and read it. Harry thought for a minute before pulling his wand and tapping the steering wheel turning it blue for a second.

"Care to touch the wheel, Nymph?" Harry asked politely. Tonks touched the wheel after caressing his hand first. When both had touched the wheel, they and the car disappeared only to reappear in a darkened industrial center. Harry gave Tonks another kiss before accelerating away and following a series of road signs.

"Need some help finding where you are going?" Tonks asked playfully.

"I think I got it," Harry admitted. "Like I said, I planned this out."

Tonks started to recognize a few landmarks and guessed where they were going. "You planned this?"

"Well," Harry faltered, "I had the idea and made the arrangements, but someone else made the technical plans. As I have been taught, I know my limitations and how to overcome them."

"Usually, we work on getting better in the areas we aren't good at not by using others to pick up the slack."

"Some make three lefts when one right would work just fine, Nymphadora."

Tonks couldn't help but laugh as she learned she had been correct in her guess. They bantered back and forth until Harry came to a stop in front of the Granger's. "I will be back in a second. Keep the car warm."

Tonks watched Harry run up the steps and knock on the door. Minutes later, Hermione, David, and Jane filed out of the house following Harry back to the car. Both parents were dressed in the Wizarding clothes Harry had bought them, and Hermione wore a long, flowing, light blue robe that seemed to float after her.

Ever the gentleman, Harry opened the rear door for Hermione and Jane to slide into the car while David circled around to the other side. Harry made sure everyone was in before closing the door and getting behind the wheel and pulling away from the house.

"I didn't know you could drive this well, Harry," Jane commented looking over the interior.

"Tonks taught me this summer and I seem to be a quick learner," Harry told them as he came to a roundabout. He seemed slightly confused until Hermione reached up and discretely tapped him on the shoulder causing him to make the next left and take that road.

Tonks watched Hermione slide back into her seat as if she hadn't done anything. "Put a lot of effort into this, Hermione?"

The young woman smiled and shook her head. "Harry did everything he could have been expected to do. Anything that needed an extra level of attention, I offered my assistance when necessary." Hermione leaned forward and across her mother to tap Harry's left shoulder.

When the next turn came up, Harry turned left and merged into traffic. "I see," Tonks said truly amazed at how the teens worked together. "Harry refused to tell me where we were going tonight no matter how much I tried to get him to."

Harry smiled as he pulled away from a light. "I only know the first stop," Hermione said. "And my parents only know as much as you do."

The journey continued as they made their way deeper into London. After a few things went by the window, Tonks figured out where they were going and she nearly squealed with joy. She couldn't stop herself from leaning over and kissing Harry's cheek for all the effort he had put into the evening. "You sweet man,"

Harry smiled wide and happily as he navigated the city streets with minimal direction from Hermione. When they pulled up outside the big book shop, Tonks' guesses came true. Harry hopped out of the car and opened the door for Hermione and her mum before doing the same for Tonks. Harry leaned in and whispered in Tonks' ear as he took a hold of her arm like any proper gentleman would. "I don't care anymore. If you do, let me know."

Baffled by what he said, Tonks allowed Harry to lead her into the Leaky Cauldron. She found out quite quickly what he meant when she went to pull away but he held on tightly for a few seconds before slackening his grip. Tonks looked into eyes and paused before leaning into him gratefully.

She looked over her shoulder and saw David with both of his women hanging on either of his arms. When they got into the pub, Tonks saw that they weren't the only ones attending whatever Harry had planned for the evening. She saw the Weasleys, the entire group except for Bill, Charlie, and obviously Percy who hadn't taken Fudge's removal well. Remus stood next to the group of redheads while talking to

Hagrid, Minerva, and Moody. The biggest surprise was the pair who looked like they were in a very deep conversation, Albus and Amelia.

Tonks checked Harry again, catching his eyes, and looking at their entwined arms and hands before gazing into his eyes again. She saw life behind his glasses. He was nearly bursting with eagerness to show her off. She knew he had been thinking about a lot lately, but this subject had never been brought up outside of the bedroom before. The more she watched him, the more she knew that Harry was ready to take on the world if he had to. Tonks ignored the possibility of being seen and placed a soft kiss on Harry's lips before turning to face their companions for the evening.

They hadn't been seen by most of the waiting group yet, but Tonks saw a disapproving look on Minerva's face. She returned it with a glorious smile and leaned against Harry with purpose. Tonks saw a slight smile form on the Professor's lips before it was gone as fast as it appeared.

"Ready?" Harry whispered in Tonks' ear before taking a decisive step towards the group.

Tonks allowed herself to be led by Harry as her heart raced with excitement. Ginny was the second person to catch sight of them. She gave them thumbs up before nudging her mum and tilting her head towards Harry. Molly frowned at first but relaxed when she saw the look on Tonks' face and how happy Harry was.

"Everybody here?" Harry asked in a deep voice watching everyone turn around. Harry released Tonks' hand so he could shake hands with everyone who had come. He received hugs from Ginny and Molly and an affectionate handshake from Minerva if that was possible. Amelia and Albus watched Harry return to Tonks' side as soon as he was able without making a scene.

Ron was fumbling about until Ginny kicked him in the leg and pushed him over to Hermione. With quite a lot of effort, the Gryffindor in Ron showed itself and he offered his arm for her take as the other men had done. Ginny slid in behind Harry and on Hermione's other side before slipping into girl talk.

Harry motioned everyone forward and led the way into Diagon Alley with Tonks firmly in place on his arm. Even with the festive nature to the evening, Harry and Tonks still scanned the Alley for threats as they traveled up the sparsely populated road. A few aurors nodded to Amelia while others watched one of their own in the company of Harry Potter. The trip to the restaurant, whose name Harry still couldn't pronounce, was rather quick. When they arrived, Molly looked worried.

"Harry, dear, I know that we have some money now, but this is a very expensive place for all of us to eat at."

"It is my treat," Harry offered waving them forward. "When we were here before, it didn't seem too expensive."

"Says the man," George began.

"Who probably owns it," Fred finished.

Molly was about to tell them off when Harry went quiet. "I don't know if I do or not, actually. I would have to check with Ragnok or Griphook to be sure. Too bad they couldn't make it."

Amelia looked to Albus and eyed him carefully. When she saw surprise on his face as well, she sighed and chuckled. "Something funny, Minister?" Albus asked privately.

"Only Harry would invite goblins to dinner with his friends and whatever he considers me," Amelia said shaking her head.

"If you asked him," Albus clarified with a smile, "I believe he would call you a friend."

They entered the restaurant and gathered near the stand. A prim and proper man strolled over to them. He eyed the Weasleys and Hagrid cautiously until he saw the Minister and Dumbledore. "Minister, what a pleasure to have you in our establishment. How many in your party?"

"I am only a guest," Amelia told him looking to Harry and Tonks who moved forward.

“We are all together,” Harry told the man who snapped to attention once he saw Harry and Tonks again.

“Yes, Sir,” the man said clearly and formally. “We arranged the VIP room for you, Sir.”

“Um, thank you,” Harry muttered as he and Tonks followed the man to the private dining room. When they entered, everything in the room sparkled. The crystal ware refracted the candle light. The plates on the long table nearly glowed and the silverware was polished to a mirror finish. Harry pulled out Tonks’ chair and helped her pull it in. Harry gave Ron a look that told him to do the same.

Harry settled in to his seat and looked over those he had invited. His goal was to enjoy himself with those he considered family, friends, or in Dumbledore’s case allies in progress. Once the man had led them to the room, he slipped out the side door. Seconds later, three servers entered the same door and staged themselves around the room. One walked up to Harry and provided him a wine list along with the menu.

“Is this your list or mine?” Harry asked earning a few stares from around the table.

“It is a complete list of your wine, Mr. Potter,” the server told him. “After your last visit, we inventoried your stock. That is an accurate list.”

“We will take the same as last time,” Harry gestured to Tonks earning himself more looks. “Go ahead and pick out what you want,” Harry offered to everyone passing the list to Arthur who nearly swallowed his tongue. The Grangers were soaking up everything they saw and David made an odd sound when the list made its way around to him.

In total, five bottles of wine were ordered. The families each selected one, Harry and Tonks had another, the twins picked one out when their mum was intentionally distracted by Harry, and Amelia, Albus, and Minerva shared one. Moody broke his own rule and chose a bottle of forty-year-old scotch. Hagrid elected to go with the house ale to save poor Harry’s stock.

Molly chided Harry about having an entire bottle for just Tonks and himself, but her heart wasn't in it. She couldn't help but smile at Harry when he looked so happy. Ron and Hermione each had a full glass of wine with their parents' approval and Ginny was poured a half glass. The twins kept it at a half glass through the entire meal managing to avoid capture.

Harry and Tonks ordered the same thing as before and enjoyed the conversation around the table. The twins poked fun at people around the room. Harry was a favourite target of theirs. "Wouldn't tell us who," Fred began.

"And it was Tonks all along," George finished.

"A true Weasley at heart," they chimed in together.

"Rotten sister though," Fred quipped.

"Wouldn't tell us," George added.

Ginny responded by smirking and giving a slight bow. Harry told them about the possibility of helping them get better prices on their supplies. "Talk to Griphook tomorrow and see what he can do for you."

Albus spent much of the night simply watching Harry and how he interacted with each person. The most surprising to him was the genuine honesty and cooperation the young man had cultivated with the Minister. Albus knew that the Minister got to where she was because of Harry, but he also knew she didn't play favourites because it was expected. Confirming his worries, Albus saw first hand how close Tonks and Harry had become. Visions of the meeting where he asked for a volunteer to help Harry swam to his mind.

Albus saw the entire thing replay in his head. The eagerness Tonks had displayed then had been misinterpreted as a simple desire to contribute. Now, he knew that she had feelings for Harry at the time and most likely wanted the chance to explore them. Comparing the past to the present, Albus knew that her feelings had grown tremendously and Harry was right there with her.

When he was done reflecting, Albus found himself staring into the piercing green eyes of Harry. He was taken aback by the sheer intent behind the once innocent orbs. Memories of those eyes peeking out from under shuttered lids wrapped in a blanket and left on a doorstep came to mind unbidden. It was then that Albus realized what was going on. His bespectacled bright blue eyes widened as he figured out why those specific memories were coming forward.

His suspicions were confirmed when Harry smirked and leaned back in his chair raising his glass in a toast. Albus shook his head in confusion increasing Harry's smirk. Only when Harry tilted his glass and took a drink did Albus figure it out. *'My boy you have been busy this summer, haven't you? So much for laying about like most students on holiday.'* Albus conceded to Harry and toasted him and took a drink from his own glass. *'To you, Harry Potter.'*

Minerva and Molly both watched Harry carefully as he joined in conversations in a way he never would have before. He gave his opinion where it fit and held back when it didn't. They were acutely aware of how close Tonks and Harry sat to each other. They also noticed that their hands were only on the table when necessary.

Molly looked to her only daughter and wondered how she was taking it. She found Ginny watching them too, but the sadness she expected was absent. What she found was an honest smile filled with hope for them. When her daughter caught her eye, she glanced at Harry and gave her a knowing smirk that she had learned from her mum. *'She knew all along and she is happy for him. Bless her heart.'*

"Reckon that's a good thing?" Moody asked Remus as the meal wound down.

Remus followed Moody's good eye and couldn't help but see the joy in Harry. "I think it is the best thing for him, Alastor. He has earned it and then some." Remus nearly choked on his food when Mad Eye responded.

"That it is, for both of them," Moody said before taking another drink of scotch. "No wonder Tonks defended him so. She can't help herself. Just look at her all happy and fawning over him. She's got it bad alright."

Harry finished his second glass of wine and enjoyed the slight lightheaded feeling he had. Dinner had lasted for hours and most of the older people were beginning to tire. Hermione and Ron were arguing about something which was no surprise to anyone since no one paid it any notice. Harry signaled the server to bring the bill. When she returned with it, Harry quickly signed for it and provided the vault number.

When people realized that it was time to leave, Harry had to refuse multiple offers to help cover the expense. The Weasleys were the most vocal, but Harry refused every offer. As they gathered their belongings, Harry shook hands, hugged, and kissed the cheeks of the appropriate people. Each of the twins tried to get a snog from Harry, but Tonks was able to fend them off without cursing them with her wand.

As they filtered out of the restaurant and into the smaller alley, Harry got the feeling that they were in danger. The whole night had gone so well, but he knew something was bound to ruin it. Cloaked figures emerging from the shadows signaled the end of the warm and happy feeling Harry had been working on. "Death Eaters!" Harry yelled as he drew his wand and sent a Stunner at the nearest target.

In a flash, Harry's spell was accompanied by many others. Moody was the second to fire since he saw them about the same time as Harry felt them. Harry's spell was blocked forcing him to let go of all hesitation at showing off his magical skills. Tonks' first spell was a message to Horace followed by a Reductor Curse at a shape trying to level their wand at the Weasleys.

"Apparate away!" Harry commanded before launching a furious attack at the two Death Eaters advancing on their position. With the narrow alley working against them, Harry, Tonks, Moody, and Remus were at the front of the group preventing those behind them from aiding in the fight. The rest had to retreat down the alley and erect shields to stop any spells that came their way.

Harry's quick count put the number of Death Eaters at six. Five were on the ground with one on a nearby roof. When a spell came from above and nearly hit Tonks, Harry let his magic take over. "Accio

Death Eater!” Harry yelled Summoning the man off the roof. Harry paid him no mind as he moved on to another who was trying to hex Remus. Harry fell into his rhythm and repeatedly fired the Bone spells at the man attacking Remus.

In a series cracks and screams, the man collapsed under the sheer force of Harry’s assault. Remus managed to Stun and Bind the man before he finished tearing at his clothes possibly searching for something. Tonks used Reductors, Bludgeoning spells, and Stunners to overwhelm a second enemy. Moody bound and Stunned the man before his friends could help.

Moody was going to attack another person, but Harry had advanced ahead of the group taking the fight to the opposition and preventing others from helping. When Tonks followed Harry’s actions, Remus and Moody found themselves in the second line. Albus had moved to join them but even he couldn’t risk shooting a spell anywhere near Harry who never stopped moving and firing spells with enough power to amaze those in the alley watching.

The man who fell from the roof had been injured, but he trained his wand on Tonks. Before Harry could stop him, the Death Eater shot the Cruciatus Curse at Tonks. Harry threw up the Patrocinor Fidelis shield on Tonks to try and block the effects. When the dull grey shield erupted into existence around Tonks right before the Unforgivable hit her, she looked to Harry. Harry saw her weak smile instantly fade when she fell with a whimper from the effects of the curse.

Harry reacted by Banishing the man down the alley and into the corner of a building. The crunching sound of his back followed by the dull thud of the man’s broken body hitting the ground would prove testament that magic couldn’t fix everything. The man who hurt Tonks never walked again.

Harry moved to protect Tonks with his body and continued a ceaseless barrage of spells at the three remaining Death Eaters. Harry heard Tonks cry out behind him and he snapped. Harry felt his magic surge forward from inside of him. The spells were leaping from his wand with barely a thought. Harry had gone silent, but the spells kept coming.

Harry dropped another Death Eater under repeated Reductors. The man landed in a smoking heap down the alley crying out in pain. Albus moved ahead of Remus and attacked one of the two remaining enemies. With a complicated series of charms, transfiguration, and hexes, Albus got the best of the fifth Death Eater.

Harry turned his anger on the last man who had threatened his family and friends. Harry leapt forward lashing out with the Severing Ribbon. It flicked against the man's shield rocking him backwards. Harry swung it low, then high, then at the middle. The man in the black cloak held his shield as well as he could, but after the high shot from Harry's flaring Ribbon, the shield fell.

Harry seized his chance and whipped it back on the third pass aiming at the man's midsection. He connected and dropped the man with a scream and a light spray of blood. Harry moved in for the kill as Thor and Horace had shown him. *'Never stop until it was truly over.'* When Harry rushed to the man, wand ready to send a Bone Exploding Curse to his head, the Death Eater torn his hood off.

"Potter, no!" The man cried while staring into the same eyes he had seen so many times before. Only this time those eyes spoke of imminent death and not the usual anger, fear, and hatred. Albus moved as quickly as he could to stay Harry's wand and spare his spy's life.

"Harry!" Albus yelled pulling against the young man's wand and having little luck. "It's Severus. He needs medical attention immediately."

"He needs a fucking caretaker," Harry snapped leveling his wand at Snape's head against Albus' every effort.

"Harry, I will be okay," Tonks called from her spot on the street. "Just a little sore but I will be fine. He is on our side."

"He has yet to prove that," Harry ground out boring holes into Snape's head with his fierce gaze.

"I am asking you to leave him alive, Harry." Tonks hoped her plea would save Snape's life. She knew Harry would never be able to live

with himself if he killed Snape. She knew their history was so intertwined that nothing between them was going to be easy. "Please, Harry."

Harry heard Tonks' words and couldn't stop himself from listening to them. He knew she was right. He knew that it wasn't the time or place for ending the man's life. Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You owe your life to Nymphadora, Snape. She saved it tonight. Remember that."

Harry pulled his hand free from Dumbledore's grasp and turned to see Tonks trying to sit up on her own near the right edge of the alley. Harry looked at his friends. "You lot okay?"

Most were in shock at both the battle and the amount of magic Harry had cast in only a few minutes. Hermione was the first to speak up. "We are fine, Harry. Thank you for protecting us."

Harry waved off the comment at the same time he felt the sick feeling in his gut. "There are more!"

Harry turned to run for Tonks' location when a crack of Apparition signaled an arrival. When Harry looked at Tonks, he saw Bellatrix Lestrange standing behind her. Her mask was gone and she leered at him as she pulled Tonks to her feet by the neck. "Nothing funny, Potter, or I will remove the head of my darling cousin with only a word."

Harry froze as he took in the situation before him. Tonks was shakily standing on her feet with Bellatrix directly behind her. The woman's wand was nestled in the side of Tonks' neck right where Harry would kiss her to make her squirm with pleasure. Harry looked into Tonks' eyes and saw so many things in them. He saw a little bit of fear and anger swirling in them. He also saw the look he had been trying to figure out for a few weeks.

In that moment, Harry figured it out. He knew what it was. The pieces fell into place and everything made sense. Sadly, everything began to fall apart in the same instant. Harry felt his very soul break. He had spent a lifetime trying to figure it all out. Most of the summer had been spent piecing his life together and figuring it out. All of it was in

thanks to Tonks. And now Harry stared into her eyes as she came to terms with the reality that seemed to be unfolding.

Harry felt his world crumble as Tonks looked defiant, then sad, and finally resolute. Harry shook his head slowly as Tonks seemed to accept her fate. She swallowed deeply before blinking her eyes. A couple tears had escaped the corners as she stared at Harry. He felt her emotions. He heard her voice repeating the same words over and over again. Every moment, every laugh, every touch replayed in his head. He knew Tonks had accepted the fact that she was going to die in that alley staring at him.

"I love you, Harry." Tonks spoke so softly that the words were felt more than heard.

Harry felt his heart swell and crumble in the same moment. "I love you, Nymphadora." Harry knew what it meant. The puzzle was solved and the beautiful creature in front of him had showed him the way. He knew that he was the only person who could save her life. He was the only person who was more valuable than her to Voldemort.

"How touching," Bellatrix crowed. "My pathetic relative falls in love with Golden Boy Potter and then he gets to watch her die at his feet. Oh this is too precious for words."

A series of pops sounded at the end of the alley alerting Bellatrix to more arrivals. A group of five grey cloaked people moved down the alley and surrounded Bellatrix in a crescent shape. Their wands were trained on the woman without flinching. Harry looked over and saw Horace angrier than he had ever seen him. Judging by the size and shape, Harry guessed that Horace had brought Team Two with him. Cal had accompanied them as well and his wand was trained on the Death Eater too.

"Get the fuck back or the bitch gets it!" Bellatrix screamed pressing her wand deeper into Tonks' neck.

Harry bristled and felt his magic surge up again. He felt his limits being reached before his aura started to show. Harry heard Horace cast the wards preventing Apparition and portkeys from working. Harry knew this was where things would be decided. "Me for Nymph,"

Harry offered without hesitation. "Voldemort would praise you forever for bringing me to him."

"No, Harry!" Albus yelled. Everyone else behind him had said the same thing.

"Shut up," Harry spoke calmly. "Me for her."

"You will give your life for this worthless half blood?" Bellatrix asked seeing the huge upside to taking Harry to her master.

"In a second," Harry answered without thought.

Seizing the opportunity, Bellatrix jumped at the chance to trade. "Throw your wand on the ground and come here. You," Bellatrix ordered Horace, "remove the wards you put up. Now!"

Horace looked at Harry and saw him nod his head discretely. Harry turned his body slightly and slipped his wand back into its holster. With his right hand blocked from Bellatrix's view, Harry Summoned Ron's wand into his hand. As luck would have it, the group was still in a state of shock from before so they didn't really react when Harry wandlessly Summoned something.

Albus watched Harry's every move carefully. He was beginning to understand things and chose not to interfere. Harry brought his hand into view and dropped the wand on the ground. He turned his body again and drew his real wand instantly. "I am unarmed, now you let her go and you get me."

"Even you aren't this stupid, Potter," Bellatrix said. "You know that death awaits you, but you are still willing to trade your life for hers?"

"Death awaits us all. I am not afraid to face it when I can save the life of someone I love. My mum did that once. I completely understand it now."

"Good for you, Potter," Bellatrix said snidely. "Enough of this shite, get over here so we can go see my master."

Harry nodded his head and looked at everyone briefly. He smiled at all of them before letting his repressed magic swell up again. When Harry took his first step forward, Bellatrix pulled her wand back a little in preparation for the exchange. He gave Tonks a loving smile and nodded once.

From Harry's point of view, everything happened in slow motion as if he was playing Quidditch and closing in on the Snitch. Tonks twisted her body to lessen the grip Bellatrix had on her and pushed her wand further away. Harry wandlessly Summoned Tonks to him and put his wand on target. Bellatrix fired a Severing Charm harmlessly into the air while Harry let his magic loose. He said no words, but he felt every bit of the spell as his thoughts drove the magic forth, *'Death'*.

The sickly green jet of light shot from his wand while Tonks flew passed it in the opposite direction. Harry dove to the left, grabbing Tonks, and pulling her to the side. The flare of green light lit the alley and nearly seared the eyes of all who were witnesses. Bellatrix Lestrange was hit in the head by Harry's Killing Curse. Her lungs released one last breath as her body slumped to the ground with a soft thud. Her eyes were wide and showed the shock of being killed by a sixteen-year-old kid with no real gift for magic or so she was told.

Harry held Tonks to him. Tears leaked from his eyes as he hugged her to him. He couldn't, wouldn't let go. "Nymph, please be alive. Please, for me, say something." He hoped for the best. The more he thought about it, the more he knew that losing Tonks would break him. She had helped him overcome too much to leave him now. He had never known what love had felt like until Tonks showed him. Every kind thing she had said or done during the summer proved what it was to him.

Harry held his breath too afraid to look in case she was gone. "You owe me a long bath, Harry," Tonks mumbled against his chest.

Harry held her at arms length before kissing her as if his very existence relied on it. "What ever you want it is yours, love." Harry pulled Tonks to him and held on tightly as he fought against the emotions ravaging his body. Fear, elation, despair, and what he now

knew as love all vied for prominence as images of what could have been kept popping into his mind.

Tonks allowed herself to be held and reveled in the sensation. Harry's hugs had always warmed her heart before, but she knew Harry now understood what she had been feeling for weeks. She had always been quick to express her love for others in the past, but Tonks knew from the beginning that Harry wasn't ready for everything that came with it. Any fear she had of just being Harry's passing interest for the summer evaporated when he told her he loved her. She may have heard the words, but she felt his intent to her very core. He meant what he said and he proved that to her.

The Unspeakables stood amazed at seeing Harry Potter strike down Voldemort's favourite. The stories they had heard made him out to be larger than life when in truth he was just a young man. A young man who negotiated a deal that meant certain death for himself to save another and ended up killing a very lethal woman by the end. They were pressed into action by Horace barking orders.

"Death Eaters go with us," Horace commanded. "Stun and Bind them before transport. Kill all who resist if they are conscious."

After a second's debate, Dumbledore moved to block their access to Snape. "He is one of ours leave him to us to take care of."

"He is a Death Eater to me," Horace spoke forcefully to the old wizard. "I think you have enough to take care here without messing about with a murderer like him."

"I will not give him up to you." Albus did his best to look as impressive as he could be, but his wand remained at his side pointed in a safe direction. "He is the only spy inside Voldemort's inner circle. We need to keep him out of the Ministry's hands."

Horace laughed once. "Do you know for a fact that he is the only one in the fold?" Horace looked over at Harry who still held on to Tonks as if she would fly away. He checked his people and found most of them carrying out his orders as given except for Cal. The only hidden member of Team Three kept his eyes fixed on the pair. *'Seems to be*

figuring it out.’ “I will leave it to the Minister to decide his fate then?” Horace prompted graciously.

Minister Bones stepped from her spot near the front of the group. She had moved to protect Ginny when the fight broke out. The parental nature she had earned by caring for Susan had forced her actions without conscious thought. “Albus, are you sure that Snape is one of yours?”

“Yes, Minister, I am sure of it.”

“Leave Snape with us then,” Amelia ordered Horace not sure if he would follow her directive. Surprisingly, Horace nodded and moved the two Unspeakables away from the bleeding man with a hand wave.

When the issue of the spy seemed resolved, almost everyone seemed to focus on the fate of the young man holding onto an auror. They watched as Harry stood up lifting Tonks with him. He cradled her close and kept whispering things to her. She responded back and seemed to test her legs a bit before Harry forced himself to let go. He kept one arm around her for the simple fact that he couldn’t let go and didn’t want to. As a pair, they started walking to the group who remained in shock from the events of the evening.

“What of Potter?” Horace asked hoping he could arrange a debrief before Albus or Amelia got a hold of him.

“I will take him,” Albus offered strongly while directing Hagrid to pick up Snape and handing him a portkey to the Hospital wing.

“A death has occurred and he must be interviewed by Ministry officials,” Amelia spoke in a slightly uncertain way.

Harry and Tonks maintained their slow pace to rejoin their group and continued their private conversation. Knowing the best way to resolve the issue, Horace made the most diplomatic gesture he had made in years. “All things considered, I suggest we ask Mr. Potter what he wants. It is not like he will go to Azkaban for killing Lestranger. She is after all an enemy of the Ministry and an escaped prisoner. Rather positive outcome as I see it.”

Harry heard the words and formulated a response to everyone. He knew Horace would treat him well. He knew Amelia would ask questions he couldn't answer. He knew Albus would ask questions that didn't matter all the while trying to figure everything out on his own. "Tonks and I are going to return our guests to their home. Then, she is going to be treated for Cruciatus exposure. Finally, we are going home for the evening." Harry looked into Tonks' eyes and saw her agreement. "Tomorrow, we can meet with who ever need us to. Pick a place, one place, and we can all hash it out at one time. If you can't decide on a place, then I choose Gringotts since it is a neutral place and none of you will have more clout than the others."

Horace figured that the compromise offered by Harry was acceptable and agreed while the last of the Death Eaters were portkeyed away. Amelia frowned at the loss of leverage of the Ministry, but she knew that nothing bad was going to happen to Harry especially considering the ultimate victim of the night.

Albus, on the other hand, chuckled. "It is not us who have the advantage of Gringotts, Harry." Harry ignored the apt comment and kept moving Tonks closer to his friends. He also ignored the looks he received from Hermione, Ginny, and especially Molly when he reached them.

"You lot okay?" Harry asked worried that they would always see him as a killer.

"Fine, Harry," Hermione offered first. "Are you sure you want to take us home? We can take the Tube instead."

Harry waved off the offer and urged them toward Diagon Alley and ultimately the car. "Tonks is just sore from the curse. Let's go." As the Grangers broke from the group, Hermione showed her parents how their daughter became who she was. She proudly led them away hoping she wouldn't breakdown as the crumpled form of a human slid passed the edge of her eyesight.

Harry read the expressions on his friends' faces and sighed. He saw Ron wearing his normally confused look but there was a touch of fear and awe added in to it. Ginny still had tears in her eyes from the emotional shock of what had happened. Molly only just managed to

hold her own daughter in an attempt to protect her. Remus watched him with a large amount concern and worry.

Hugging Tonks to him he spoke. "I am sorry we all had to see that, but..." Harry paused and looked from Moody to Minerva and finally resting on Albus. "But I lived, you lived, and Nymph lived. That is what matters at the end of the day and I am not going to feel sorry for that woman. Not now, not ever. She stole Sirius from me and I would be damned if she was going to take Nymphadora from me too. I will talk to you tomorrow after the meeting at Gringotts. Thank you for coming tonight. It was great until they showed up." Harry said the last looking over at the crumpled body of Bellatrix. He felt saddened by the fact that it ended the way it did, but he saw no other option then or now.

'You made your choice when you took Nymph hostage. Your last, worst choice.' Harry looked down at Tonks and hugged her to his chest. He felt the sadness vanish as if a spell had been cast on him. He breathed in her scent and let his mind drift back to all the mornings of waking up next to her. *'I would do it again if I had to.'*

As Harry walked passed Horace, he found a vial being slid into his hand. The fluid had the same colour as what Harry had taken when he was recovering from the same kind of exposure in Medical. They followed the Grangers back to Diagon Alley, through the pub, and to the car. With a tap of his wand, Harry portkeyed the car and its occupants to Hermione's neighborhood. He dropped them off, accepting a hug and a kiss on the cheek from Hermione, before he portkeyed the car and Tonks home. Once inside the garage, Harry looked at Tonks who had laid her head in his lap. He watched her breathing and heard the click of the clock in the dash. He saw the hands swing passed midnight and closed his eyes.

'I know what love feels like and it is Nymph.' "Time to go to bed, Nymphadora"

Tonks opened her eyes and looked up at him. She smiled the same smile she had been giving him for weeks only he felt the meaning behind it now. "After I take that potion and you give me a nice hot

bath, I hope we do more than sleep, Mr. Potter. You did after all save my life tonight. I have a lot to payback after something like that.”

Harry smiled and leaned down to kiss her. He opened the door planning out how to nurse Tonks’ injuries away.

18. Aftermath

Harry helped Tonks out of the car and into the house carefully. He had one arm holding her waist, pulling her to him, and the other grasping her near hand tightly. As the energy of the night faded, Harry couldn't help but reflect on what had occurred. The fact that he had taken a life began to bare its teeth in his mind and the reality of it started to weigh on him. As a result, he held Tonks closer in the hope that she wouldn't see him as a killer and run off. The dark feelings he had been fighting against throughout the training and the missions as an Unspeakable emerged slowly creeping into his senses.

The only thing that kept his focus planted in the real world was the soft woman next to him. As asked and promised earlier, Harry escorted Tonks up the staircase and into the master bath. He handed her the vial Horace had slipped him. She downed it without a second thought while Harry drew a bath and helped Tonks disrobe. Once the outer layer was removed and the black dress after it, Harry saw a bit of something that sparked his more primal urges eliciting a hungry twinkle in his eyes.

The feathery thin fabric of light blue lace and silk beneath the dress stopped Harry cold. He searched her body and found an exquisite creature standing before him ever watchful of his quivering hands poised over the barely-there straps. Harry unconsciously released a breath and stilled all movement.

"I was hoping for it to be a surprise when we got back, Harry," Tonks said softly while she ran her hands slowly over her flat stomach coming to rest on her hips. "I see that it is still a surprise just not quite the one I was hoping for. The circumstances may be less joyous than expected, but I am alive and more than pleased that you are too. If you will help me out of this and into the hot bath perhaps I can model it for you a bit later."

Harry merely nodded and averted his eyes away from Tonks' penetrating gaze. She rotated so Harry could pull free the lace bow in the small of her back and begin the process of loosening the wondrously sexy underwear. He couldn't help himself from running his hands over her shoulders and down her back as he tugged and

pulled while she writhed her way free. When the top slid down her shapely firm legs and settled at her feet, Harry allowed himself a quick caress of her bum before she spun to face him.

The soft brown eyes tried to catch his elusive green ones but failed. Tonks ran her hands down her sides, catching the edges of the panties, and letting them join the top on the floor. Tonks stepped forward and relaxed into Harry for a couple seconds before she drifted back to the now full bath. She placed each leg into the water slowly and let her body follow them into the bath. When her breasts disappeared under the surface of the bubble coated water, Tonks watched Harry carefully. He kept his head lowered and his eyes elsewhere. "Harry, care to tell me why you have found the tile so interesting in the last few minutes?"

Harry knew he had to tell her, knew she deserved to hear what he was thinking. He formulated his thoughts as well as he could before speaking them aloud. "I...I...I am a killer. I took a life and that makes me no better than them. I feel the darkness inside of me trying to take over. I replay it in my head over and over again. You accepting your own death and looking at me while you did it. I just couldn't let you do that. I couldn't let someone I love, die. Not again. I could save you. So I did." Harry drifted off and Tonks let him be. She let him speak without hinting at an attempt to interrupt. As his eyes shifted to the darkened window on the other side of the room, Harry spoke again. "As evil as I feel right now, if I had to save you again I would do it exactly the same way. I wouldn't change a thing because you lived when she died. I may feel dirty and tainted now, but I am so happy that you are still here. I love you," Harry said the last in a whisper.

Tonks looked him over and cooed softly while she ran her damp hand over his as it rested on the edge of the bath. "You knew what was going to happen. She was going to kill me to hurt you. I accepted death when I knew you would try to sacrifice yourself to save me. I knew you would; it is in your nature to be selfless. All those years of abuse didn't turn you evil, it turned you good. Better than any I have met and that is one reason I fell in love with you. How could I not? In all honesty the minute you asked me to just be myself, I was sunk. And I haven't regretted it for a minute since."

“Even though I am a killer?” Harry asked the floor looking disgusted.

Tonks reached out and raised his head until she locked onto his pained eyes. The torrent of emotions in them went straight to her soul. She felt his pain and conflict as if it was her own. “Harry, I have killed before. Do you see me as a killer?” Tonks watched Harry shake his head furiously but stopped his comment with her finger. “How could I see you as a killer when it was my life you were protecting? I would be dead if you hadn’t saved me.”

“But I feel so filthy,” Harry said forcefully while keeping eye contact. “I feel Voldemort itching inside to get out. I have felt his evil before. He tried to possess me in the atrium. My bloody scar links our emotions, well, at least it did until you came around. Not sure how that worked, but there it is. It is a constant fight not to become like him. I don’t know if I can do it.”

Tonks shifted and placed both of her hands on either side of Harry’s face running her thumbs against his cheekbones. “Harry, Harry, shush,” Tonks cooed. “The fight gets easier as you win each battle, but it never goes away. It will always tempt you and that is a good thing. When it stops tempting you, you will know that you have succumbed to it. Keep fighting my lovely man and you will always be free of it.” Tonks smiled the same smile Harry had been trying to figure out for days and even weeks.

Feeling confident enough to ask, “What is that look you are giving me?”

Tonks laughed loudly as she pulled Harry closer. “What do you think it is?”

“I wasn’t sure for the longest time, but I think I figured it out tonight.” Harry examined her face intently looking for any signs of fear or disgust. He found none.

“And what do you think it means then?”

Harry ventured his guess out loud. “I would have to say love since nothing else made sense. Am I right?”

Tonks smiled the same smile again and asked, "Care to join me? Seems such a waste of warm water to keep it all to myself." She raised her chest out of the water a little letting her breasts push the bubbles off to the sides.

Harry returned the smile with his own causing Tonks to sigh happily. He felt safe and loved just by the look in her eyes. With a quick thought, he Vanished his clothes and climbed into the bath with Tonks. He blew the bubbles away from his mouth as they rose up to greet him. With a few clusters of them sent airborne, Tonks followed up the attack on Harry's mouth with her own.

The soft, warm kisses quickly gave way to hungry and forceful ones. Tonks moved Harry under her as she shifted farther around until she was on top of him. Her hands fisted into his hair and held his mouth in place as she attacked him ferociously. He did his best to prevent her movements from sinking them both but only just succeeded in his efforts. She drove on devouring his lips, mouth, and tongue ignoring his attempts to keep them above the water. Tonks growled her finest tone as she slid her lower region over him while continuing her aggression.

"I plan to show you just how much I love you, Harry, even if it kills you in the end."

Between kisses, Harry asked, "What about your soreness?"

With a throaty laugh, Tonks answered while sliding further onto Harry. "When I am done, I will be sore in a completely different manner and loving every minute of it."

His fears of Tonks seeing him differently were misdirected. She did see him differently but in a far more positive light than he had expected. She proved time and again that she wanted Harry with her and as close as possible. She never got around to modeling her underwear for him as they passed out from exhaustion in the early hours of the morning.

Tonks snuggled her head into Harry's chest purring all the way. Consciousness found her enough that she realized that Harry was awake and most likely fretting judging by his rigid posture. Tonks

ventured a hand from under the covers up his chest before stopping on the other side of his neck. Leveraging her body up, Tonks found his mouth and kissed him soundly. "What you thinking about?"

"Last night a bit," Harry admitted. "But before you flog me, I have spent most of my time thinking about today and all the questions people are going to ask me not to mention how I am going to explain everything to the Weasleys. Oh shit, they will be able to see the Thestrals because of me."

"I hate to say it, but it was bound to happen, Harry," Tonks said softly. "With so much happening, death will be a companion to many. At least they got to see some good come out of a death instead of it being a loved one. Those are the hardest to deal with."

"But they saw it because of me."

Tonks tutted at Harry while shaking her head and flicking her hair around Harry's face. "Hermione will analyze the event like a muggle scientist and figure it all out before you make it out of this bed. Ron will chalk it up as you beating the bad guys and smack you on the back like any other male would after a superb Quidditch match. Ginny will most likely worry about you as much as Molly and have a good cry over it. As I see it, you are going to have the worst time of them all and thankfully I am here to help you along. Any questions?"

Harry sputtered a bit before he really thought about what she had said. Hermione was spot on aside from her worry for him which normally included irritated gestures and exasperated breaths. Ron was simple and rarely differed from his common reaction to everything. Tonks' prediction about Ginny gave him the most pause. *'Would she really cry over what had happened? Would she have nightmares about it like her first year?'*

"Not to ruin your brooding, but your friends are made of much stronger stuff than other people's friends. Whether they come that way or you help make them that way, they will be just fine. Give them the credit that is due." Tonks smirked as she looked up and into Harry's unobstructed eyes. "They have put up with you this long; they aren't going to fall apart now."

Harry knew what she meant and played off of it. "Put up with me?"

"Yes, I hear you were rather a bother this last year with all your moping about and yelling for no reason."

"No reason!" Harry yelled before he caught on that Tonks was baiting him. "Oh you are a bad little minx aren't you?"

Tonks bowed as best she could while still lying on her side and against Harry. "I aim to please, dear sir."

Harry let his laugh become a dirty smirk. "Oh you did that alright." Harry kissed Tonks a few times before his urge to hug her took over. He pulled her into a warm but firm embrace. After a few minutes Harry told her, "I have never told someone I loved them before. In all honesty, I never really knew what it felt like. Sure I dreamed about my parents loving me like the other children's parents loved them, but I couldn't remember it. The closest I came to it were a few times Petunia seemed to come over all odd and she touched me like other parents before returning to normal and jumping back as if she was burned. Those times only happened when I was younger though."

"A couple times the parents of classmates would show concern for me, but it only lasted until Dudley would threaten their kids to stay away from me. Looking back I could say that I loved Sirius and Hermione and Ron are close behind, but it isn't the same. I love you differently from the rest of them. When I look at you I see the last several weeks. More over, I see tomorrow and the next day. For the first time in my life, I see tomorrow as something more than one more day to survive or outlast. Sure they are part of it since it is me and all, but it is so much more."

Tonks curled into him and hugged him with all her heart. "In your own way, you captured it pretty well, Harry. Don't ever change, please."

When they finally reached the kitchen, Dobby made quick work of the breakfast preparations while Harry relieved Hedwig of her numerous burdens. A corner of bacon and three minutes of petting later, Harry opened the first envelope. The Ministry crest shown at the top of the official piece of parchment as Harry read it. Next he opened the letter

from Dumbledore before setting it aside only to see it snatched up by Tonks.

The last letter was shorter, much shorter, and it read like any order from Horace.

Gringotts, eleven o'clock.

"Well, at least they all agreed on a time and place," Harry quipped. "The pages of worthless stuff really show against Horace's brevity. I kind of like that the more I think of it."

"We have a convert in our midst!" Tonks exclaimed drawing the attention of Dobby and Tiki away from their ongoing rivalry over the kitchen. "Sooner or later, everyone likes the way Horace does things; simplicity at its finest leaving no room for error or confusion. Usually people fight it longer than you have just out of spite though."

"I would like to think I am more practical than that, but you never know." Harry and Tonks ate their breakfast and finished with enough time left to relax for a few minutes in the living room before leaving. As they sat discussing various questions that might come up, Harry wondered if the press was going to find out about what had happened. Images of the possible cover story nearly made him ill.

Breakfast eaten and cloaks donned, Harry and Tonks Apparated to Diagon Alley. They found the streets rather empty considering the hustle and bustle they had been met with the week before. Harry saw a few aurors walking the streets and could feel the tension in the air. He scanned the area for anything that might tell him why everything felt the way it did; he found nothing.

With a hand in hers, Harry and Tonks walked the length of the Alley together. He paid no mind to the aurors watching them intently nor did he hesitate when a few camera flashes went off. They stayed the course and reached Gringotts without stopping. Once they entered the grand entrance and were bowed in by a pair of goblins, Harry saw that he was a few minutes early. In the rear of the bank, Horace stood alone and was ever watchful of those who passed by. With a subtle incline of his head, Horace signaled to Harry that he wanted to speak with him.

Seeing a chance to get their stories straight before the others arrived, Tonks pulled Harry over to Horace as smoothly as possible. When they drew even with him, Horace lowered his head and spoke quietly. "Answer their questions if you can, safely. If they are too close for comfort, refuse to answer. They have nothing on you to leverage what they want out of you."

"I killed her," Harry said hurriedly. "Isn't that leverage enough?"

Horace smiled evilly. "If they could dictate the situation, we would be in the Ministry right now. You killed Lestrage to save Tonks. How do you think that would play in the papers? *Harry Potter kills Death Eater to save girlfriend and protect the Minister*. Even you are better at politics than that, Harry."

Harry thought about the point Horace was making. Even twisted as much as the Prophet could manage, Harry stopped Bellatrix from killing an auror and most likely others.

"Self defence, Harry," Horace told him firmly. "If you feel pressure from either of them, just say that. People can do amazing things when their own lives are threatened. If they ask about me, play dumb. Better yet, act annoyed that the Ministry has another person here. I can handle the rest."

"What about everyone who saw Harry using magic and quite spectacularly I might add?" Tonks asked while leaning into Harry with her warm body.

Horace snorted at her actions before answering. "None of their business as I see it. Otherwise, you have access to any number of people and books to learn from. You are Harry Bleeding Potter after all; use it to your advantage. Helps that you have an auror on your arm too," Horace offered pointing at Tonks and scanning the room quickly. He stepped back quickly and grew stern before whispering, "Any who figure it out and aren't under the proper secrecy spells must be freed of the information. Also, stop by the Department today before five. Cal has figured it out."

Harry saw the abrupt change in attitude and fixed an annoyed scowl on his face before turning around. Entering the double doors at the

front of the bank were Dumbledore and the Minister. A contingent of four aurors followed behind her before taking up positions just inside the doors. As the pair came even with Harry, Albus smiled keeping a watchful eye on Horace while Amelia offered her hand graciously to Harry.

“Mr. Potter, a pleasure as always,” Amelia said formally giving Tonks a nod. “I received your note this morning suggesting we meet here.”

Harry didn’t want to let on that he had no idea what she was talking about so he simply nodded his acceptance of what she said. Greetings were made all around except for Horace who stayed back from the conversing group. Harry looked around and saw Griphook walking towards him. “Griphook,” Harry called. “Do you have that meeting room available that I asked about?”

Always perceptive, Griphook smiled his toothy smile and bowed his head. “I reserved a conference room that would befit you, Harry. If you will excuse me for a few moments to assure everything is prepared to receive you.”

Griphook slid between the gilded doors leaving Harry flatfooted as how to proceed. Dumbledore presented the perfect opportunity. “I didn’t catch your name the other night,” Dumbledore asked Horace extending his hand.

“That you didn’t, Professor,” Horace spoke firmly. “I see little reason to change that now, with all due respect of course. Minister,” Horace nodded at Amelia getting the same in return.

Tonks tapped Harry on the side trying to tell him something. Doing his best at interpreting it, Harry spoke up. “Speaking of, who are you and why are you here?” Harry asked trying to look annoyed and suspicious at the same time.

Stepping into her role as diplomat, Amelia interceded. “Harry, if you would allow this man to remain things will be easier. I can’t tell you who he is, but sufficed to say he is a concerned party in this matter.”

The doors opened at that very moment providing a chance for Harry to dodge a touchy situation again. “What ever just so long as we get

this over with soon. If my guess is right, I have many people waiting for answers.”

“Harry,” Griphook announced, “the room is ready for you. Please follow me.” The goblin led the group deep into the recesses of the bank. They twisted and turned so many times that Harry hoped an escort would be available to lead them back out when they were finished. After one final turn, they came to a pair of doors. They looked to be made of polished black granite with gold inlays. If Harry hadn’t already been in Ragnok’s office, he would have sworn that it could be found behind the doors before him.

Harry heard Amelia breathe rather loudly as Griphook pushed open the door on the right. “After you, Harry.” With thanks, Harry entered the room with his hand still firmly in Tonks’. Once inside, a funny sight presented itself in the form of Ragnok carrying a stack of files in his aged hands.

“Ragnok,” Harry said hurrying to take the burden from the elderly goblin. “Let me help you.”

“You are too kind, Harry,” Ragnok said smiling at the young man and watching the others out of the corner of his eyes. “It is fortunate that I happened to be using this very room before you arrived since all of this goes to you anyway.”

“To me?” Harry asked puzzled as he set the pile of files on the black granite table in the center of the room. It matched the doors beautifully and was a nice contrast to the numerous lighter wood chairs that surrounded it.

“Why yes, Harry,” Ragnok said softly. “Between Griphook and I, we have spent the better part of the last week handling your accounts with us. I can say with all honesty that I haven’t worked this hard in decades and I am loving every minute of it too.” Ragnok looked over the others and nodded once to show he had seen them. “If I may monopolize an additional minute of your time, Harry, an emergency meeting of the board of directors of one of your primary companies has been called. We were about to send out the notice, but since you are here I can tell you in person. The meeting is scheduled for noon here at the bank. I can redirect them here if you would like.”

Not sure what to say, Harry tried to be accommodating. "What ever is easiest, Ragnok."

"It would be most beneficial for you if it was held in here, Harry," Ragnok offered. "I shall make the arrangements then." The aged Goblin left the room with the assistance of Griphook. When the doors opened everyone saw a gathering of goblin security guards standing outside of the room looking as surly as any goblin could.

Harry looked at the pile of numerous files and papers stacked on top of each other. The top file had some paper in it and a quick glance told Harry that his next meeting was going to be with a potion supply company that he had a fifty-three percent share in. The second file contained nothing but black sheets and was the same as the third. Harry put the pieces together about what had happened and smiled to himself. *'Always thinking ahead they are.'*

"Shall we get started?" Harry asked before sitting down at the head of the table. Tonks slid into the seat next to him worming her hand into his and giving it a squeeze. "Apparently my time is limited this morning so let's get this over with."

"Harry," Amelia began formally, "I need to ask you some questions concerning last night. No one here is looking to get you in trouble, but I am sure you can understand our concern when a sixth year commands magic in the way you did not to mention the use of an Unforgivable on another."

"I thought no one was here to get me in trouble," Harry replied with a slightly challenging tone.

"Obviously," Amelia relented her formal tenor, "the use of certain spells is understandable considering the victim, if you could call her that, and those threatened."

"Forgive me, but what was your question?" Harry asked feigning ignorance.

"First off," Amelia said, "how did you learn to use magic in the way you did?"

Harry shrugged and shook his head. "I am not sure. I just did what I needed to do to survive. That happens a lot to me." Harry inclined his head at Dumbledore expecting a response from the older wizard.

"Minister," Albus prefaced, "Harry has always been exceptionally gifted in his magical strength. Both of his parents had similar gifts but nothing on the level we saw last night. Granted, I was unaware that Harry had learned to harness his magic as adeptly as we witnessed, but I can say that it was never unexpected only a little premature."

Harry eyed Dumbledore carefully as he heard the play with words that was all too familiar. He was rewarded with a sigh and a guilty look away by the professor as he was held under the penetrating gaze of a student. "Is that so?" Harry asked rhetorically.

Amelia missed the look Harry was giving Albus and pressed forward. "How did you become so fast and fluid in your magic, Harry?"

Harry laughed to cover up his nervousness. "When a Death Eater is trying to kill you, you go faster and never let up. The same applies to when Voldemort is trying to kill you, and I am well acquainted with that scenario as well." At the mention of the Dark Lord's name, Amelia stilled and shuddered slightly but never made a sound. "You are doing better, Minister," Harry offered in a friendly mood.

"If a sixteen-year-old can say it," Amelia added, "the bloody Minister of Magic should at least be able to hear it without squealing like a little girl. Lead by example, right?"

"My thoughts exactly," Harry smiled warmly seeing that he had made his point and shifted her attention away from his magic for the moment.

The questions continued as they seemed to dance around the big point of the entire meeting. Dumbledore interjected from time to time but stayed quiet most of the time. He seemed to be holding most of his urges to press for information. Horace was so quiet that Harry almost believed that he had fallen asleep ten minutes into the interview. If it weren't for the turning of his head, Horace might as well have been asleep since he offered no comments or questions of his own.

As their time wound down, Amelia was forced to ask the tough questions. "How did you learn such advanced spells, Harry?"

"What do you mean by advanced?" Harry countered trying to buy himself some time.

"The bone spells you used," Amelia ticked off her fingers, "the Severing Ribbon, the shields. Superb work by the way, but still how did you learn them?"

Harry scanned those in the room before answering. "I choose not to answer that question if you will forgive me."

"Harry it is a valid question and I really must have an answer on it," Amelia pressed.

"Fine," Harry responded curtly. "I came across a book that contained them in excellent detail."

"Where Harry?" Albus asked one of his few direct questions. His eyebrows were knitted with uncertainty as he awaited clarification.

"I moved into my family's home this summer," Harry admitted. "I found a rather comprehensive library and started with the spells that made the most sense considering we are at war and I always seem to be in the middle of it no matter what I do."

"Surely you must have had to practice these spells," Amelia queried. "One does not produce effects similar to yours without significant practice no matter how powerful you are. Which brings me to your ability to avoid our detection instruments. None of the spells performed that night, by you, were recorded. How is that possible?"

"As an emancipated minor and head of an ancient magical family, my use of magic detected or otherwise is of no consequence," Harry said leaving no room for interpretation. "Next question." Harry let his impatience show trying to force them along as the time ticked by.

"Did Tonks teach you those spells?" Albus probed.

"Next question," Harry stated again staring Albus down the entire time.

“How did you learn the Killing Curse?” She had asked the biggest question of them all. Harry found Tonks’ hand in his to be a lifeline that never lessened. She held his hand tightly and her warmth calmed him. For the first time since it started, Horace actually sat up and leaned forward. This was the question that he knew was coming and the answer to it would make all the difference in the world.

Harry took a deep breath and blew it out before answering slowly. “Who says it was the Killing Curse?”

“Harry,” Amelia spoke softly, “I saw it. It was the Killing Curse.”

“I never said the words,” Harry offered another excuse.

“As you proved,” Albus countered, “you do not need to say the words to initiate magic, Harry. You showed that you had learned some wandless and wordless magic recently. Granted, you will learn about it this year to some degree, but no where near the way you performed. It takes people years to master even the most basic of wandless spells.”

“Perhaps if I wasn’t kept in the dark about everything that has to do with magic,” Harry argued, “I wouldn’t break so many of the accepted rules pertaining to it. You have only yourself to thank for that, Professor.” Albus sighed and accepted his responsibility. In a gracious move, the wizard gestured for Amelia to continue on.

“What were you thinking when you fired that spell at Lestrage?” Amelia asked simply trying to get some level of understanding.

“I thought about Tonks dying,” Harry gripped her hand tightly. “I thought about Sirius dying at her hand and I wasn’t going to let her take Tonks too. I wanted it to stop. I wanted her to stop. The only thought that came to mind was *Death*. I thought that and willed it to happen to save Tonks. I am sorry that someone died, but I am not sorry it was that woman. The right people lived, and I can live with that.” Harry felt his heart swell as he spoke the words. He knew they were true and felt the reality in his hand. Nymphadora’s warm hand in his proved to him that he had done the right thing.

“Harry, I am concerned that you will suffer the effects of taking a life in the near future,” Albus spoke kindly. “You had a terrible time after you saw Cedric murdered. So soon after Sirius’s death gives me great pause concerning your mental and emotional health. Perhaps we can discuss it later today?”

“Thanks, but no thanks,” Harry declined. “Tonks has helped me in dealing with Sirius’s death. I came to terms with it earlier in the summer. Last night happened because a person threatened someone I care about. She left me two choices; Tonks dies or she dies. I know I made the right decision. I had all the information I needed to make the choice and it turned out as well as I could have hoped. Next question and time is running out.”

Amelia set her quill down and shook her head relinquishing the floor to others. Albus seized the opportunity and addressed his question to Horace. “How did the Department of Mysteries become involved in the events of last night?”

Trying to play up his role, Harry jumped in. “Is that who you are with?” Harry saw Albus smile and Amelia look away. Deciding he wasn’t going to get another chance to say it, Harry took advantage of the spectators. “By the way, shoddy security on your department. A bunch of kids got in without any trouble.”

Horace gave Harry a biting stare before answering the proposed question. “We, along with the department of Magical Law Enforcement, have been tasked with the retrieval and apprehension of the Death Eaters. Last night provided the magical community a tremendous victory against those who are trying to destroy it. One dead and four captured makes for a positive in my book.” He leaned in and eyed Dumbledore carefully, “I suggest you keep your spy away from me. I will not be so lenient with him next time.”

“You didn’t answer my question?” Albus pointed out pointedly ignoring the threat against Snape.

“Didn’t I?” Horace retorted smiling all the while. “Image that.”

Horace went silent and took on a bored look as he waited for the meeting to end. The doors opening proved to be the signal of the end

of the meeting as Ragnok and Griphook entered together. They walked over to Harry and handed him a sheet of parchment listing the people on the board. "They will be here in a few minutes, Harry."

Harry smiled and nodded. "As much fun as this is, we must move on. I hope you got everything you needed, Minister."

"No, not everything, Harry," Amelia admitted looking disappointed, "but it will have to do. I don't suppose you will give me better answers will you?"

"No, I think those given were good enough. I am sorry to rush you along, but it seems that some other people want to pressure me on some things." Harry shook everyone's hand except for Horace's and wished them well.

Albus asked Harry to stop by Hogwarts later if he had the time. "Professor Snape wishes to speak with you, Harry. I have no idea what it is about, but he seemed rather troubled by it. A most entertaining look he has been wearing."

"I might just stop by since I need you to show Tonks something," was Harry's reply. Albus looked at Harry as if he was afraid to confirm his assumption. "Yes, that is what I want you to show her. If you are not willing, I will do my best to tell her but I will mess it up for sure if I try. It is your choice."

Albus sighed again and let his shoulders fall. The act did not escape anyone's notice. "I will be ready, Harry. I leave it to you to decide on those matters." Getting some colour back, Albus continued, "You leave me little choice anyway. You always were good at getting what you want when it really counted."

"I learned from the best," Harry hinted before turning his attention to the doorway. He saw the original four goblin guards stationed on either side of the doors. Another group of men had queued up and were nervously huddled near one wall. Behind them were additional guards who looked as surly as the first set. A man wearing a dark green cloak stood as tall as he could among the intimidated assembly. He was a stout fellow who looked like he would challenge a goblin to

a fight if he could win some money in the process. Harry instantly disliked the man.

He watched Albus and Amelia leave the room and took note of how the men in the hallway reacted to seeing the Minister of Magic and Albus Dumbledore. All of them took notice and showed the proper respect afforded to people of their stature except for the obvious leader of the group. When Horace left, he put extra effort into looking intimidating and unapproachable.

Two of the goblins escorted the trio into the labyrinth of hallways and back to the lobby. Harry looked at Ragnok to see him patiently waiting for something. Harry gave him a puzzled look but kept quiet. When the group began funneling into the meeting room, Ragnok spoke out.

“Harry, I hope this room is acceptable to you for your next meeting. It is our finest meeting room.” Ragnok spoke louder than was necessary while keeping an eye on the advancing board members.

“Everything has been wonderful, Ragnok. Thank you for fitting me at the last moment.” Harry caught on to what the old goblin was doing and was grateful.

“What ever you need, Harry, you know that.” Ragnok nodded and turned to leave the room. Griphook remained in a corner nearby with a quill and parchment ready. Harry remained standing as the men filtered around the table. The leader of the group eyed Harry carefully before sliding his eyes to Tonks and her pink hair.

“Mr. Potter,” the man spoke formally but slightly down to him, “I am the Chairman of the Board for Arnot’s Potions and Supplies. It is good you could attend this meeting on such short notice.” His words said he was happy, but his body language and facial expressions told a different story.

Harry watched the man carefully before letting a false smile show. “Not a problem since I was already here for a previous meeting with a few people.” Harry saw that Dumbledore and Amelia had left a decisive impression on most members. “Your timing was perfect since the meeting was beginning to drag on. The Ministry and I have

never seen eye-to-eye on certain things, but I have high hopes of improvement on that now that Amelia is Minister.”

“We share the same opinion...” one skinny man said before the Chairman stared him down ending the comment.

Harry inclined his head a little before extending his arms to all the open chairs. “Please be seated so we can begin. I have other things that need my attention today so my time is limited.” Harry sat down in the same chair at the head of the table that he used previously. Tonks returned to the seat she had used before as well.

The Chairman looked unhappy and scowled. “Since you have obviously never been part of a board meeting, I must educate you on the finer points.” The man puffed out his chest taking on an air of self-importance before continuing. “The Chairman sits at the head of the table for one. Secondly, visitors are not permitted,” he said eying Tonks with distaste.

Harry accepted the challenge and replied as if he didn’t hear the condescending tone. “There are two ends to this table, feel free to sit over there. And Tonks is here as an advisor not a visitor.” Harry watched the others take their seats quickly trying to stay out of the power struggle. He figured they should all have had a stick-on nameplate reading “*Yes Men.*”

Harry pulled the file on the company out of the box Ragnok had given him. He scanned it quickly and found out the Chairman’s name was Aras Buquet. “Advisor or not, she has no place here,” Aras complained.

Harry closed his eyes and took a breath during the man’s objection. The file had a note scribbled in the margins, ‘*You own a controlling share. They work for you.*’ “Aras, sit down,” Harry said in a weary tone before opening his eyes again. He fixed the man with a stare that told him there was little room for debate on the matter.

Aras made a show of making it look like it was his idea to sit down in the first place. He tried to take control of the meeting but Harry was having none of it. “I will cut to the quick here. Your attempt to hold this

meeting at the last minute without me, failed. Now, why have you called a meeting like this only days after I bought into it?"

"I can call a meeting anytime I want, young man," Aras spoke up.

"It is Mr. Potter to you, Aras Buquet," Harry replied. "Now, why am I here?"

Aras's scowl grew even deeper. "We have a new ownership directive to approve and a few financial deals to brief you on." Harry looked around the table and saw that only a few people looked eager to discuss the points of business. "The ownership directive says that no one member may own more than forty-nine percent of the company. As such, you must divest yourself of four percent of your ownership immediately." Aras slid two sheets of parchment towards Harry. Various members of the board passed the sheets down the line to him.

When Harry looked them over, he saw that the ownership directive had been drafted the previous day and needed a majority approval before being enacted. "If I read this correctly, that directive hasn't been approved yet. A majority is needed and it seems that I hold the majority vote personally."

"Just sign the thing, kid, and nothing bad will happen." Aras leaned back in his chair looking confident that his threat was received.

Harry laughed before leaning forward. "And just what do you think a hollow threat like that means to me? I have been threatened by people far worse than you."

Aras matched Harry's posture before answering. "Perhaps they are one of the same." Aras leaned back smiling in apparent victory.

Harry looked to Tonks and Griphook before smiling in response. "If you think a threat from you carries the same weight as a threat from Voldemort, you are sorely mistaken." Harry ignored the gasps from the others, but reveled in the abject fear that shone on Aras's face. "I see that you are far more scared of him than I am, that should tell you something about me. Since my ownership came mostly from Death

Eaters and the Blacks, I will take a leap of faith and surmise that the Dark Tosser has his fingers into this company.”

Harry watched the members react to his comment. Some looked scared; some looked downright petrified. Others appeared pleased at how things were going. “If any money is being funneled to Voldemort, it ends now. I will have the goblins go through the entire company if I must to see that it stops. Anyone approving or involved in the transfers will be sacked and the Ministry will be notified.”

“The majority shareholder doesn’t have that ability, Potter,” Aras growled.

“Maybe not,” Harry relented. “But I have the voting power to remove the President of the company and he does have that power. I am sure I could find someone to see that my wishes are carried out. My biggest problem now is you. Anyone who relays threats from Voldemort is either a follower of his or just some berk toying with death.”

“Sounds like you are describing yourself there,” Aras pointed out with less confidence than before.

“I have played Voldemort’s games before and survived,” Harry offered with a smirk. “I am not worried about the next one. Are you?” Many of the members looked at each other before slumping into their chairs. Harry tried Occlumency on a few of them and they all said the same thing. They had no part of Aras’s power struggle or his connection with Voldemort. They only wanted to run the business and live their lives.

“Griphook,” Harry turned to the goblin as he took notes, “I believe the Ministry would be interested in the threats made here today by Mr. Buquet.”

“I agree, Harry,” Griphook smiled a toothy smile.

“If there is a connection,” Harry continued, “I think a few shares will be up for sale in the near future. In the best interest of the company, I am sure we don’t want a Chairman with such tainted links to criminals. Perhaps we should elect a new Chair with a less questionable past.”

"You can't do this," Aras barked while looking around the room and finding his normally supportive and fearful following looking elsewhere. "And I suppose you want the job then?" Aras yelled as he saw his maneuver explode in his face.

"Me?" Harry asked. "Heavens no. I can't run a business from Hogwarts. I am sure we can find someone capable of doing the job who isn't threatening everyone. I will not be bullied by you or anyone." Harry watched the members before clapping his hands together and standing up.

"As much fun as this is, I have things to do today and they do not involve sitting here with all of you." Harry helped Tonks up and thanked Griphook before walking towards the door. When he reached the door, he turned to one of the men he had tested with his limited Occlumency experience. "Would you contact the Weasley business here in Diagon Alley? From what I hear they need potion supplies all the time. Might make good business sense to extend them a reduced rate since they know how to run a proper business."

"I can do that, Mr. Potter," the man said.

"Excellent, and Aras, don't look so depressed. Fudge tried the same tactic and look what happened to him. Do not make threats you can not enforce. Good day." Harry and Tonks left the room and one of the guards showed them the way to the lobby. "That was tiring. Give me a snitch any day."

"You love confrontation and you know it, Harry." Tonks rubbed his hand softly.

"No, I just like making sure people are treated fairly. Aras might not be a Death Eater, but he is friends with those who are. I tried to read four of the board members and three of them were good people stuck in a bad situation. That arse has all of them scared of what could happen. Like Voldy would waste his energy on a few suits to keep a man like Aras in a power position."

"I have unleashed a monster in you, Harry," Tonks said laughing. "The Harry from the start of summer never would have done what you did today. I like it."

Harry had become hesitant on the monster comment but eased quickly when Tonks continued. "It is all learning how to manage my life. Everything is much more complicated now than two months ago. So, where to first? Hogwarts, the Ministry, the Weasleys?"

"The twins are right here if you wanted to try them out first?" Tonks offered as they left the bank hand-in-hand.

"Alright, sounds good to me," Harry replied eyeing a small pocket of people who had cameras and notepads waiting to attack. "Bloody hell, the reporters are all over the place now."

"Like you didn't see the cameras going off when we entered the Alley," Tonks quipped. "You knew that by holding my hand in public everyone was going to find out. You did that on purpose and you loved every minute of it."

"You are damn right I did, and I am still loving it. Let them find out. I am not going to let the press force me into hiding. Besides, according to the list Ragnok made for me I own a modest share in the Prophet. Let's see if they figure that one out sooner rather than later." Harry put an arm around Tonks and hugged her. The snap of flashes went off in a dizzying fury.

"Am I just a trophy to you then?" Tonks asked smirking while Harry thought quickly. "I had you there, Harry. I am glad to see you learning to overcome the expectations others put on your head. You shouldn't hide from the world any more. Let them see you enjoying life."

In response, Harry placed a kiss on Tonks cheek mid-stride as they reached the Weasley's shop. Always the gentleman, Harry opened the door and motioned Tonks in first before following closely behind. He heard the people outside the door starting to bicker with each other while trying to get the best position at the windows and door. "Might not be able to leave the same way. I hope they still have that back door or we will be fighting our way out."

The patrons in the store heard the noise coming from outside and all turned to see Harry and Tonks enter the building. They got quite the memory by seeing Harry standing in the doorway looking happy and slightly defiant as he scanned the very busy room for one of the

owners. They saw the intent swimming in his bright green eyes as his line of sight swept over them. Once he spotted his target, a smile flitted across his face.

Everyone watched Harry wrap an arm around the woman with him and whisper to her. A few women in the shop sighed as others shot hateful stares at Tonks. They all watched the pair walk across the room and stop near one of the Weasley twins. Every female noticed Harry take Tonks' hand in his and hold it while they conversed with the Weasley.

"Fred," Harry called out as he and Tonks walked over, "I need a minute."

"Harry," Fred answered as he checked the store windows. "Looks like you need more than a minute judging by all the people staring at you from outside."

"Well, an escape route would help too, but I will take what I can get," Harry said as he held Tonks closer to him. "Hey, Lee."

"Hi, Harry," Lee answered when he exited the back room and joined the small Gryffindor reunion. "Who's the friend, Harry?"

"Nym..." Harry was stopped from answering by a sharp elbow to his side. "Ow."

"Tonks," Tonks told Lee extending her newly released hand. "Don't mind Harry, he has issues to work out right now."

"Yeah like how to get my ribs fixed before school." Harry cocked his eyebrow waiting to see what Tonks would do next.

"You are the only one, other than my parents, who can say my full name without getting in real trouble," Tonks lectured. "Your privilege does not extend to introductions though."

"Thanks for telling me earlier then," Harry eyed her closely.

Tonks took pity on him and pulled him into a hug and kissed him lightly on the lips. "I will make it up to you later, okay, Harry?"

Harry smiled eagerly before realizing that others were present. "Oh, sorry about that. She is a handful sometimes."

Lee managed to mumble out a confused, "I missed something," as Fred joked, "She looks to be more than a handful to me, Harry." Fred was rewarded by Tonks wand appearing in her hand and pointing at him. "Just kidding, Tonks, just kidding."

"Is George around?" Harry asked looking at the back of the shop. "I would like to apologize about last night among other things if you catch my meaning."

"Yeah, Harry, he's around." Fred motioned them back telling Lee to mind the store while they were busy with important business stuff. "No need to apologize though. You did what you had to. A bit scary, but then you never were all that balanced to begin with." Fred joked to lighten the heavy atmosphere that had descended on Harry as they searched for and found George in the workshop.

George looked to Fred and saw the serious look on his face. He held his comment until he figured out what was going on. Harry eyed both of them before speaking. "I am sorry that you guys got caught up in what happened last night. I never wanted either of you or your family to see what happened. I can't tell you how badly I feel about that."

As one the twins rejected his apology. "No need, mate. She had it coming and we are glad no one else was hurt."

"You were incredible," George said.

Fred continued, "It was the only thing to do really."

"I wanted to keep your family out of this," Harry spoke out.

"Never happen, Harry," Fred shook his head.

"The Weasleys are in this until the end," George finished.

"We never know when to quit," Fred added.

“We blame mum for that,” George slipped in. “She’s the stubborn one you know.”

Tonks placed her hand on Harry’s arm to quiet him. “They understand the reality of it, Harry. You know better than to try and argue that point. You can’t save everyone from the evils of the world. There is only one of you and so many of them. Be happy with what you accomplished and never forget what we talked about last night.”

Harry saw the twins nodding their heads slowly as they tried to guess at what Tonks had told him the night before. Harry let out a breath and found Tonks watching him. “You aren’t going to let me wallow are you?”

“Not a chance, luv.” Tonks hugged him tightly as Harry slowly accepted the fact that she would never let him slip back into how he used to handle his problems. Harry looked at the twins again before asking them if they had any questions.

The troublesome pair looked at each other and seemed to have a conversation that only they could hear. After a few minutes they turned as one. Fred spoke for the pair, “How did you Summon Ron’s wand away from him and could you teach us? That would be wicked fun to do to others. Think of the mayhem we could cause.” Both got whimsical looks on their faces as they drifted off into their own land of mischief.

Tonks answered. “Willpower and intent. Magical ability can help but you must have the other two to stand a chance.”

“Well, Harry has all three and then some,” Fred said sadly. “Poor bloke is destined to be the next Dumbledore.”

“Nice knowing you mate,” George consoled. “Alas, you were so young and had such a bright future ahead.”

“Gits,” Harry quipped jokingly as the tension faded. He was about to leave via the backdoor when the other reason he was there came to mind. “You guys need potion supplies pretty often, right?”

“You bet your arse we do,” both intoned.

"Someone from Arnot's Potions and Supplies should be meeting with you soon," Harry told them. "If he doesn't show in the next week, let me know as soon as you can."

"No problem, Harry."

The couple bid the twins goodbye and snuck out the back into an empty alley. Tonks told him that they should probably go to the Ministry now and then Hogwarts last. Together, they Apparated to the team room to find one person waiting for them. He sat in the corner with his hands folded in his lap in deep thought.

Harry felt the man's presence and drew his wand instantly. They hadn't bothered to put their hoods up since Harry had decided to tell Cal who he really was anyway after Horace told he had figured it out. The man in the corner of the room watched the wand with interest before clearing his throat.

"It all makes sense you know," Cal said calmly. He looked from Tonks to Harry before leaning out of the shadows and revealing his unhooded face. "I never would have guessed you were Harry Potter, but who else could have had Horace all giddy like he was. The only person ever to have survived the Killing Curse. The only one to have seen You-Know-Who, fought him, and lived to fight him again as many times as you have. I knew Ceps was good from the first day, but I always thought *you* were lucky."

Harry swallowed before asking, "And what did you decide I was? Good or lucky."

Cal laughed heartily. "Oh you are both, Ceps. You are both and then some. You have proven your skill here faster than anyone else I have seen before. You have earned everything you have by showing us what you are made of. I may be twice your age and then some, but I could never hold that against you. You might be use to your fame getting you things whether you like it or not, but here we earn them. And you have done that on your own merits."

"Well, you know who I am, but I don't know who you are," Harry posed.

"Harold Fenwick," Cal said. "My brother was killed by the Death Eaters the first time around. I had no family left after he died so I offered to move from the Research side to ours. I was just getting into it when you took that bastard down the first time. After that, I learned to relax and enjoy my life and work in equal parts. I may not have your intensity, but I hope I offer enough to hold up my end. I do have one question for you though. How do you stand up to that thing so easily?"

"Voldemort?" Harry asked receiving confirmation. "Who else would bother if I don't? They all look to me to show them how so I do it. I really don't have a choice in the matter anyway."

Cal took in Harry's words nodding as he processed them. "If that is how you get through the day then who am I to say different. Well done last night. She deserved worse than she got you know."

Harry bowed his head once before looking into Cal's eyes. "I know, but I still killed a person."

"Never give up on your humanity, Harry," Cal spoke softly. "Without compassion, you will become like him. It is an honour to be on your team." Cal smiled at Tonks and clasped his hands together. "I am glad you finally found one who treats you well, Tonks. You have never looked so happy in all the years I have known you."

"There is a good reason for that, Fen,' Tonks smiled and leaned against Harry. "He makes me happy."

"Glad to hear it. We have the rest of the week off while information is extracted from our new or reoccurring guests," Cal said before smiling and Apparating away with a soft crack.

"That went well," Harry said to the empty space where Cal had been standing seconds before.

"He is a great man who has listened to me whine about my problems more than a few times," Tonks admitted. "I knew he would take things well. Kind of hard to work him up really. So, we only have Hogwarts left and it is getting late in the afternoon."

Harry dreaded the trip to Hogwarts. He knew that Tonks was going to learn something that might scare her away, but he hoped that it wouldn't. He also knew that the necessary meeting with Snape wasn't going to end well since nothing ever did when the snarky Professor was involved.

"Do we need to see Horace before we leave?" Harry asked Tonks hoping they didn't. He had to deal with far too many people in one day and he wasn't close to being done yet. Tonks answered by sliding against him and giving him a soft, wet kiss on the lips before letting it linger longer than was needed. "I'll take that as a no then?"

"Exactly, Harry dear. To Hogwarts and then home for some fun. I still owe you for saving my life."

"Uh, didn't you thank me last night?" Harry asked as Tonks kissed him again.

"That, oh no," she said seductively lightly playing with his hair. "That was just me warming you up. It should take me all week to properly thank you for it."

Harry went all fuzzy and vague as he thought about all the things Tonks hinted at by her statement. A few soft kisses on his neck brought him back to the present. "Let's get this day over with so we can go home."

In a flurry of magic, both Apparated to an area just outside of Hogwarts' grounds. With his judgment properly derailed, Harry hurried along the winding path to Hogwarts and two of the worst meetings of the day. As the couple, hand in hand, passed the gates and started up the hill to the entrance, Hagrid saw them. He walked over to them at a faster pace than he usually walked to catch up and keep even with them.

"In a 'urry, 'Arry?"

"Um, yes, Hagrid, actually we are in a hurry," Harry forced out while he fought off images of Tonks in silk things and bubbles.

“What Harry is trying to say in his unique way is that we have a few things to take care of here before we go home,” Tonks explained as she laughed at Harry who pulled her along. “I have to thank him for saving me last night. If you understand my meaning, Hagrid?”

“Oh,” Hagrid chuckled. “Don’ let me slow you down then. I was young once.”

“Thanks, Hagrid,” Harry called over his shoulder. “I will stop by the first chance I get when school starts.”

Tonks laughed the whole way to the school and through the doors before Harry came to a halt in the entrance way. The lightness that Tonks had fostered died immediately. She noticed Harry still as he squeezed her hand tighter. She managed to rub his back for a little while before he spoke.

“We should see Dumbledore first,” Harry said in monotone. “You might change your mind about me after that and there is no reason delaying it at this point.”

Tonks couldn’t believe how defeated Harry had become in such a short time. “Nothing he could tell me would change my mind about you. Now stop being like this. You really let the small things get to you, Harry.”

“Small things, yeah,” Harry mumbled as they walked towards the office entrance. They had made it half way when they were spotted by Peeves. He cackled in preparation for his attack before remembering Tonks threat from earlier in the summer. He almost overcame his hesitation when he caught site of Harry. The amount of determination that shone on the young man’s face told the poltergeist that it wasn’t the time to press his luck. Knowing of another target who was far more limited in his ability to get revenge, Peeves soared off in the direction of his next victim.

As they reached the gargoyle, Harry started listing off sweets. As that list was exhausted, Harry switched to Weasley Products. Tonks watched Harry become more frustrated as item after item got them no where. With a disgruntled growl, Harry stared the statue down. “Oh

for Merlin's sake open already. I don't have all day to keep guessing things."

"Mr. Potter," Minerva said from behind them.

"Professor," Harry replied without turning around.

"Did you know she was there?" Tonks asked Harry.

"Yeah," Harry replied waving his hand around as if it was nothing to speak of. "She has been there for a few minutes listening to our guesses."

Minerva inclined her eyebrow as she heard what Harry had said. "How did you know I was here, Mr. Potter? I made a special effort to remain quiet."

"It's a gift, Professor," Harry said losing patience and drawing his wand. "If it won't open on its own then I will open it the hard way."

"Potter," McGonagall scolded, "put that away before you get into trouble. *Conundrum*." At Minerva's words, the statue began to swing away to reveal the ascending staircase.

"Not a sweet for once?" Harry asked as he pulled Tonks onto the fifth step in the series as they ascended upwards.

"It is a reflection of his current mood, Potter," Minerva told him with a worried look. "Please do what you can to alleviate that problem."

"That depends on him, Professor," Harry said before they disappeared up the tower climbing ever closer to the Headmaster's office. Harry turned to Tonks and kissed her on the mouth before running his hand along the side of her face. "I know what you said before, but no matter what happens after you see it know that I do love you. That is all I can ask." Harry stifled her comment with his finger by lightly laying it on her lips.

Any further discussion was held as they reached the top of the tower and the solid door swung open of its own accord. Inside the office, Harry saw Dumbledore sitting at his desk looking very weary and as

old as his years. Fawkes sat on his perch crooning as if it was the wind making the noise and not a phoenix. Harry held Tonks' hand as they entered the office before stopping in front of the ancient desk holding a few destroyed silver trinkets and a pile of parchment on the opposite corner.

They remained silent as Albus rubbed his face and adjusted his glasses. "Harry, Tonks, always a pleasure. The memory you spoke of is in the Pensieve, Harry. I believe you can show Tonks how it works if she isn't already familiar with one. I would like to speak with you both before you view the memory," Albus paused before adding, "if you would be so kind."

Harry took a breath and nodded his affirmation before sitting in a rather wide and comfortable chair that was behind him. A second chair was next to his and Tonks ended up settling herself in it after pushing it against Harry's. All seated and mildly comfortable, Albus looked out the window as he formulated his questions. Harry found that his recent frustration with the old man's constant delays wasn't present. He read the Headmaster's face and movements and could tell that he was really thinking and not stalling as usual.

Breaking the silence, Albus posed his first question, "Are you truly safe where ever you have been living?"

Harry heard the desperation in the question asked and felt compelled to be confident in his response. "I am perfectly safe, Professor. I have Tonks, Jules, Tiki," Harry laughed slightly before continuing, "Dobby and Paul to look out for me. I have never felt safer in my life as far as I can remember."

Albus inclined his head obviously in thought again. "Who are Jules, Tiki, and Paul?"

Seeing no danger in answering, Harry offered the truth. "Griffin, elf, elf. Tiki and Paul served my family before they went into hiding." Albus laughed after a few seconds. "What?" Harry asked with interest.

"Something your father always told me privately when your family's safety was brought up. He always told me that I may have Gryffindor House, but he had a griffin at his house. After puzzling for a few

months on that, I chalked it up to his mischievous ways having one over on me. Little did I know then. How I miss him. He was always good for a mental puzzle. Once I finished figuring out one of his riddles or stories, he would give me another. Not to discount him or his abilities, but I am confident that your mother thought them up in the first place. She was the crafty one in that relationship. She had a flare for style too. Minerva misses her greatly. I know they worked on projects together from her forth year on. A mind like Ms. Granger she had.”

Harry absorbed the information like a sponge. He reveled in the stories that included his parents and how they were from day-to-day. Harry gripped Tonks’ hand tightly willing her to help him keep his emotions in check.

“I am truly sorry for keeping so many things from you, Harry,” Albus said painfully. “I only wanted to save you from the pain of learning how wonderful they were to end up knowing only their memory. I know that you wanted to know, everything, but I felt it was too harmful for you. My concern for you overshadowed my objectivity. Painful or not, you deserved to know them in whatever way I could provide you. I promise to change that this year. I will be available to you in my free time and if that isn’t good enough, I will make time.”

Harry could see the honesty in Dumbledore’s words and on his face as he smiled sadly at him. With a nearly broken voice Harry thanked him for the offer with a promise to hold him to it. The entire time, Tonks held his hand and rubbed it lightly.

“If I may be so bold,” Albus prefaced carefully, “how close are you and Ms. Tonks?”

Harry looked at Tonks and smiled a heartfelt smile. “Close enough, Professor. I took a life to save hers and I would do it again without hesitation. I hope you understand that.”

Tonks matched his smile and leaned against him as well as she could. “I see that you have both found someone that you care about. I am happy for each of you. I know Ms. Tonks’ life has not been easy finding someone who wanted to know the real person beneath the surface. I also have an idea of how bad it has been for you, Harry,”

Albus raised his hand halting Tonks' objection. "But I will not claim to know it well or in detail. So much of your past has been kept concealed from me. You did some of that yourself, but most of it falls on my head for not being more watchful. Again, I apologize for that as much as you will let me."

"It has been difficult," Harry admitted while watching Albus carefully. He saw the man look down and wither slightly before his eyes.

"So much to repair from my mistakes," Albus hung his head in shame. "I can only hope you will allow me to try and repair those mistakes. I know I can never fix them completely, but I wish for the opportunity to try."

Harry felt the sincerity in his words and looked to find Tonks frowning. She patted Harry's hand lightly as she looked at him. Looking up, hope for so many things shone in her eyes. "Professor," Harry began slowly as Albus met his eyes. "I am still here aren't I?"

The wise wizard smiled a wide smile in answer. "You have grown into the best possible person you could have, Harry. Let no one tell you different." Albus shared his smile with Tonks before folding his hands and becoming more like his old self. "With a good base to build from, I hope you will honour me with additional answers. Feel free to refuse if you must, but the more information I have the better."

Harry nodded but added one caveat. "That works both ways, Professor." He received a nod in answer.

"How much magic have you done over the last few weeks?"

Harry smirked before answering. "Enough to hold my own, Sir."

"How have you done so undetected?"

Another smirk and a smarter remark. "I believe Amelia asked the same question and my answer hasn't changed since this morning."

"The Potter in you comes out," Albus quipped. "How many spells are you proficient in?"

“Enough to get by in everyday life and probably more to fight a few battles should the need arise,” Harry said evenly finding some enjoyment in the banter.

“And there is the spark that Lily always brought into a conversation.” Albus looked at Fawkes before turning back to Harry. “The fight last night wasn’t the first one of the summer, was it?”

Harry’s smile deepened as he formulated his response. “I had to protect myself from the Dursleys once or twice, so, no it wasn’t.”

“Have you fought with any Death Eaters this summer other than last night?”

“Why of course I have,” Harry offered. “I have fought with Snape on multiple occasions. We never had an Order meeting without one.”

Albus returned Harry’s smirk. “Is Professor Snape the only Death Eater you have fought with?”

“Asked and answered, Professor. Please move on to something else.”

“How many spells can you cast wandlessly?”

Harry began counting but stopped after he reached six. “I will say that I know enough to get by. I have to keep some surprises don’t I?”

Albus laughed outright on Harry’s answer. “You have done nothing but, Harry. It is one surprise after another and they just keep getting bigger. The Ministry, your financial situation not to mention your activity involving the purchase of companies out from under the Death Eaters, your unwavering determination in everything you have attempted this summer, and Ms. Tonks as well just to name a few. I know there are more and you are greedily holding them back.”

“I do what I can, Professor,” Harry said simply causing Tonks to laugh.

“That you do Harry,” Albus rubbed his hands together like an eager child awaiting a present. “How have you increased your use of magic to the degree you have achieved?”

Harry weighed his choices before giving away some of the truth. "Tonks took the time to explain magic to me. The whole thing about willpower, intent, and Magical ability made sense after I thought about it for awhile. She used my past experiences to explain the different parts to me."

"A personalized lesson in magic," Albus queried in an off-handed way. "Things make more sense now, but let me see if I have some of it figured out. Obviously, the place you are living has ancient wards preventing the detection of magic use. Tonks has used that opportunity to teach you to harness your magical potential. As such, you are afforded the chance to practice said magic and learn how it all works in relation to everything else. It is obvious that you have been practicing because there is no way you could have done what you did last night without knowing your own limits with all of those spells. Many are beyond Hogwarts completely and we are not likely to teach the Bone Exploding Curse to sixth years. The students are far too emotionally driven for that to be safe."

Harry looked at the Headmaster and smiled in a childlike way. "And then what happens?" The glee was contagious and Tonks soon joined him in fits of laughter.

"And there is your godfather showing his influence," Albus hung his head and couldn't help but shake it from side to side in a defeated way. "I told your parents that you were impressionable from a young age, and they should keep an eye on you. Sirius always did make promises of corrupting you when they weren't looking. He would be happy to know it worked."

Harry regained control of himself and pulled Tonks into his lap where she happily found a comfortable spot to sit. "You are forgetting what this wonderful creature has done in the last few weeks. She is the real corruption, Professor."

Tonks smiled impishly and shrugged not even bothering to deny her role. "And I would do it again in a heartbeat, Harry. You were always too serious and didn't laugh enough. I am proud of what I accomplished."

Harry hugged her and couldn't resist giving her a kiss. "Sorry, Professor, but you can see how she has messed with my mind. She is nothing but trouble."

"And you love every second," Tonks challenged. "Go ahead and try to deny it."

"Why would I?" Harry asked staring her down playfully. "This has been the best summer yet."

Albus sat back and watched the two banter back and forth as if he wasn't there. "It warms my heart to see you happy, Harry. It really does. Now on to school related items, I received your class selection and I was rather surprised by the fact that you didn't take Minerva up on her offer to get you into Potions. Could you explain to me why?"

"My career choices have changed, Professor. Thanks to a little prodding from someone, I am looking at Quidditch as a real option instead of only a dream. Otherwise, I have my holdings to manage hence the Business class I selected. And the only way Snape would let me into his class would be if he got something really big and the last thing I want is to give him anything he wants. Professor McGonagall deserves better than to deal with him for me. Besides, I loath to spend another minute in a classroom with that man. He hates me more than anyone else in the world and I can't take the high road on this one. I hate him as well. Avoiding him makes the best option as far as I see it. "

"That makes sense to me but politics? You have always seemed resistant to dirtying your hands with politicians."

"I blame Tonks; she made me do it!" Harry pointed at her as she kept her place in his lap.

"You put up such a fight over it too," Tonks mocked. "If you have done anything this summer it is proving you have a gift for politics. If you still don't believe me, what has happened this summer that you haven't had a hand in? Name me one thing, Mister."

Harry tried hard to think of any. Minister, Gringotts, the Order, being an Unspeakable all came to mind but he couldn't say anything about

the last one. Harry looked at her, almost consenting, before looking at Dumbledore for help. He received none.

“Don’t look at me, Harry,” Albus threw his hands up. “As you have shown to me, I know very little about your summer and their goings on. And of what I do know, I would have to side with Ms. Tonks on this one.” Harry grimaced at him and his lack of help. “A word to the wise, Harry, I found that agreeing with determined women is usually easier than fighting them. You have used that skill many times in your friendship with Hermione I believe.”

Harry looked to Tonks and saw her wearing a triumphant look. “Bollocks.”

Tonks held her hands up in victory and did a little dance proclaiming her win. Harry responded by tickling her until she collapsed into him. “Ah, youth,” Albus smiled fondly before checking his watch. “I feel that our meeting has pretty much come to an end. As a frequent visitor to the hospital wing, I am sure you know how stringent Poppy can be with visiting hours. I believe your primary reason for coming here has yet to be resolved and the hour is growing late. I urge you to see Professor Snape before you leave, Harry. He looked rather preoccupied the last time I saw him.”

Harry sighed and hugged Tonks tightly before standing up and bringing her with him over to the Pensieve. “Do you know how they work, Nymph?”

“Yes, I have used one before,” Tonks said watching Harry the whole time. “What is such a big deal about this memory?”

“It is the Prophecy that everyone was protecting last year,” Harry told her. “It has to do with me and Voldemort. You deserve to know the truth about it.”

Tonks rubbed Harry’s arm and cheek. “It won’t change anything, Harry. You will still be the same person.”

“Watch it and then tell me that,” Harry said sadly and motioned to the basin. With a smile, Tonks stuck her head in the basin and fell into the memory. Harry watched her body for movements or tension. He

saw her clench her hand so he reached out and held on to it. She clamped her hand tightly onto his but never left the memory. As the minutes ticked by, Harry waited very impatiently.

When Tonks pulled her head from the magical device, she wiped a tear away from her eye with her free hand before turning around and asking Dumbledore, "Is that an accurate Prophecy?"

"Yes, it is," came the saddened reply.

Tonks turned to Harry who hoped she wouldn't leave him out of fear. Tonks took a step towards Harry and took a deep breath before pulling her hand free. Harry feared the worst, but it never came. She placed her hands on either side of his fretful face and made him look her directly in the eyes. With a strong voice, Tonks said, "Nothing changed, Harry. I still love you." She gave him a passionate kiss before looking in his eyes again. "All it means is that you have to beat him. I always thought you could do it and now I know you can. You can be such a silly man about things sometimes."

Harry pulled her into a searching embrace. He felt her words in his soul and knew she meant them. He knew she believed in him, but for the first time he believed it too. The challenge before him didn't seem so insurmountable anymore. "Things look easier when you aren't alone."

Tonks kissed him while Albus sighed. "They always look easier when you have your friends and family around to help." He waited until the couple separated from each other at their own pace. "As such, Harry, I will not interfere with any, how should I say this, liaisons you may involve yourself in this coming year." When Harry eyed him skeptically, Albus elucidated. "I know about most things that happen in this castle, Harry. Not all I will grant you, but most. I have always taken a wait-and-see approach on most matters and this will be no different."

With a boyish smirk that belied his true age, Albus finished. "I have teachers for a reason. Let them chase the students around the castle trying to catch them out-of-bounds. I am far too old to be doing that any longer." In nearly a whisper the Headmaster expelled, "The Weasley twins were the best show around since your parents and

their friends.” Harry couldn’t help but laugh and Tonks happily joined him. “Now, I believe a rather surly instructor is hoping for a visit, Harry. Please try to be accommodating.”

Harry let the mirthful feelings he had fade into his memories before putting up his mental shields. “I promise nothing, but I will go down there to hear what he has to say.”

“That is all I can ask of you,” the old man said. “I fear that his hate will never completely leave him in this lifetime. It has been a wonderful time with you both. Thank you for giving a chance to make amends, Harry. I will use everyday to show you that I am trying to help.”

Harry offered his hand and accepted Dumbledore’s in a shake. “I look forward to seeing that, Sir. Good evening.” Tonks and Harry left the tower and walked to the Hospital wing. Once they arrived, Harry prepared for every kind of battle Snape had waged in the past. “Here goes nothing then.”

Harry led the way into the wing with Tonks at his side. They found only one bed occupied at the far end opposite from Harry’s normal location when he found himself under Pomfrey’s care. The dark, greasy hair of the Potion’s teacher stood out among the stark white sheets of the bed. The man seemed to be resting and didn’t move when Harry drew near. The hospital top Snape wore had a thin red line wrapping around his mid-section. A noise at the end of the room caught Harry’s attention.

He turned to see Poppy coming out of her room holding a gauze pad and a wash basin with a bottle of reddish-green potion in it. “Mr. Potter, Ms. Tonks,” Poppy said. “I understand that my patient has been asking to see you. I advised against it, but the Headmaster overruled me as long as the Professor still wishes to see you. You will have to wait while I dress his wound though. It won’t heal properly and the cut was so very deep. I still haven’t heard who or what did this.”

Harry remained quiet as did Tonks while Poppy pushed the gown up and cleaned it before Vanishing the soiled gauze already in place. She poured the potion into the basin, removed an unseen cloth, and began to clean the wound methodically. A hiss and pop from the

razor thin cut sounded in the room. Harry watched as his most hated teacher remain perfectly still during the process.

“Enjoying yourself, Potter,” Snape bit out between clenched teeth.

Harry caught his eyes and held them while showing no emotion to what was going on around them. “Not particularly, Snape.”

“That is Professor Snape, Potter. Ten points from Gryffindor,” Snape growled.

“It is Mr. Potter to you,” Harry countered. “Ten points from Slytherin. See I can do that too. It is summer, Snape, or did you hit your head too?”

“I should...”

“You should what?” Harry challenged.

“That is it,” Poppy said forcefully. “I will not have you disturbing my patient, Mr. Potter.”

“Leave me be, Poppy,” Snape barked. “This has been a long time coming and I am not going to miss the opportunity. Remain silent!”

Poppy huffed but let the nasty man have his say. She knew he wouldn’t listen to her anyway since he had yet to do so in all his years.

“Come to finish me off, Potter?”

“Would you like me too, Snivellus?” Harry inclined his eyebrow. “I see that your shield blocked most of the effects. Lucky for you it was there or you might have ended up in two pieces.”

“So you admit to trying to kill me, Boy?”

“I admit to trying to save myself and everyone else from a Death Eater attack. It is not my fault you happen to be wearing your cloak at the time. You did attack us and you were, therefore, my enemy. You got what happens to those who threaten my friends. All things considered, you got off rather easy.” Harry pointed at the long cut

across Snape's stomach as proof. "Bellatrix didn't make it in case you forgot certain parts on last night."

"Oh no, Potter. I remember you killing Lestrage. By the way, how are you doing with that? You know, being a killer and all."

Tonks ran her hand over Harry's back before he answered. "I am doing rather well with it actually. Tonks lived, she died. A fair trade if I must say. In the future, you would do well to stay away from those I care about. I might just finish what I started. Would be a shame to leave things unfinished now wouldn't it?" The threat hung in the air like the odor of the potion still working away on Snape's abdomen.

Poppy gasped as she heard Harry words and felt the air drop in temperature. She was about to stop everything until she saw Snape. He was actually scared. The man who worked with the most evil person in the entire Magical world looked frightened.

"You would like that, wouldn't you, Potter?"

"Not in the least, but no one threatens my friends," Harry spoke with a deathly calm to his voice. "Tonks is much more than a friend and you would do well to remember that. Hurt her, and Voldemort will look like a picnic compared to what I will do. That is a promise. I am done losing loved ones to *Him* or his followers. Never forget that."

Snape fought to regain his composure but he had a terrible time doing it. The fire in Harry's eyes and his voice struck right to the core of the Potion's Master. Playing the only card he had left, Snape used it. "I know who you are, Potter. All the trouble you have caused this summer. The people you have been hanging out with. Particularly at night or in the woods or maybe even in alleyways."

Snape had hoped to rattle Harry some, but it failed miserably. "Madam Pomfrey, I believe that Snape is experiencing some pain. Maybe you should go and get him a potion for it." Snape saw Harry tuck his wand away as Poppy stood and moved back to her office without a word.

Once they were alone, Harry became even more terrifying. "It was you. Every time, it was you who got away at the end. How..." Harry

let his word hang before finishing, “annoying. Think what you want, Snape. You won’t remember a word of it in the next few minutes.”

Snape strained to pull his wand from its place next to his leg. When he began raising it to strike at Harry, the wand flew from his hand and landed neatly in Harry’s before being tossed over his shoulder carelessly. “Only Dumbledore saved you from suffering at the hands of the Unspeakables. They would love to get certain information out of you, but you were protected. Thing is, I am at the end of my tolerance for you, Severus, and I will not allow you to be protected next time.”

Snape looked from Harry, as he stepped back from the bed, to Tonks who had her wand trained on him. The last thing he saw was a white flash and the last thing he heard was, “Obliviate!”

“You will forget everything about the Unspeakables and how it pertains to Harry Potter,” Tonks ordered. “You will remember the battles but not know who it was you were fighting. You *will* remember Harry cursing you in the alley last night and every time you see him, you will remember that he is not someone to fuck with. I saved your life that night by asking Harry to spare you, but he should have finished it.”

Tonks put her wand away as Snape’s eyes regained their focus. He scowled when he saw both of them but his face faltered when he looked at Harry and his arm moved to protect his stomach. “Good evening, Snape. I guess I will see you on the first then,” Harry said formally before wrapping an arm around Tonks and pulling her towards the exit.

Tonks gave Snape an evil stare before melting into Harry as they left the room. Poppy returned at that moment with a vial of pain reliever. She watched Harry and Tonks leave while holding the potion out for her patient. “I suggest you steer clear of Mr. Potter this year, Severus. For some reason, I get the feeling that he is a different person now.”

Severus grabbed the vial and downed it without hesitation. His arm moved back to protect his stomach unconsciously. “I hate to agree with you, but I get the same impression.” Snape went to sleep that night slightly confused and trying to figure out what had happened.

Every time his thoughts turned to Potter, he wrapped his arm a little tighter around himself.

The couple walked out of the Hospital wing hallway and headed back to the main doors. As they descended the stairs, Dumbledore was hurrying up them. When he saw the pair, he slowed to a stop. "What happened?" He was worried and tense as he looked over Harry intently.

"We had a discussion," Harry told him as a slight scowl appeared on his face. "Snape was as pleasant as ever, but I didn't do anything to him. Last I saw, Madam Pomfrey was giving him a potion for the pain."

"Is that so?" Albus asked looking confused. "Remember that I know about most things that happen in this school, Harry. And with all the students gone, I can focus my attention from the many onto the few. Would you like to try that again?" The Headmaster role Albus had filled for years was shining brightly as he interrogated Harry about the events of only minutes ago.

Knowing what was happening and not really caring, Harry smiled. "Nothing bad happened, Professor. If you think something happened, just ask me what it is you really want to know. You will never know until you ask."

Albus watched Harry's posture and knew he was going to get nothing out of the young man. Harry had proven he was capable of withholding information if he wanted and no one was going to pull it out of him against his will. A glance at Tonks showed the same thing even though extracting the information would be easier than with Harry, the retribution that would follow would destroy any chance of a peaceful alliance. Knowing the objective was lost, Albus submitted. "He is well at least?"

"As well as when we showed up," Harry provided. "He still hates me and that is fine. I will say that we should be kept separate this year though. I get the feeling that our hatred of each other has reached new levels that even you will find too hard to overcome. Keep him on a short leash and I will stay away."

"I will do my best, Harry," Albus said, "but he is his own person. I can not control him completely."

Harry tilted his head away from Tonks who remained attached to him in an embrace. "As am I, only I will fight back this year whether you want me to or not. I will stand up to him no matter what will happen to me. I am not afraid of him and he knows that now."

Albus sighed. "I will try, Harry. That is all I can promise you."

"I am glad to see you aren't overreaching on this," Harry pointed out. "I don't expect everything, just an effort." Harry nodded before squeezing Tonks. "We really should get home. I know a few elves who will yell at me for not eating a proper dinner on time."

Harry, with Tonks, resumed their course down the stairs and out the door. They followed the path off Hogwarts' grounds and Apparated home. As predicted, Harry was met with one stern elf holding a plate of food for Tonks and a bouncy elf trying to keep the food from hitting the floor. Once the meal was eaten, Harry and Tonks retired to their room after a long, stressful day.

Harry rubbed his head trying to release the tension that had built as the day progressed. "Knut for your thoughts, Harry?"

"Just wondering how much worse tomorrow will be than today?"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about tomorrow," Tonks said before a smirk grew on her face. "Think of what you have to look forward to on the train ride back to Hogwarts. That should be what you are worrying about."

Harry answered with a groan and put both of his hands over his eyes and rubbed them hard. The weight on the bed shifted, but Harry didn't look to see why Tonks moved. When he finished rubbing, Harry pulled his hands away and opened his eyes. As the stars faded and the colours returned to normal, He saw Tonks removing her shirt and tossing it onto her cloak which was already piled on the floor.

"Do you need something to take your mind off of things?" She asked in a seductive tone.

Harry smiled with a hint of primal urge to it. "Yes, please."

"So easy to distract." Tonks unfastened her pants and moved to Harry. She put her hands on either of his shoulders and forced him back on the bed while devouring his mouth with hers. She kissed him forcefully and drove her tongue into his mouth. Harry responded instantly, all weariness forgotten, and brought his hands up to her sides before sliding them lower to push her pants over her bum and down her thighs.

She wiggled them off and worked on freeing Harry from his clothing as well. Her bra ended up across the room and her knickers crumpled into a small pile after they landed near the foot of the bed. Harry's clothes flew off of him as fast as ever and soon the two were throwing the covers off the bed in their frantic attempts to reach the soft sheets underneath.

Harry and Nymphadora, exhausted and satisfied, collapsed into a heap gasping for breath. Once their heart rates had slowed enough, they curled up together and went to sleep dreaming of endless hours doing the same things over and over.

19. Goodbyes

The sun crept over the horizon as the new day showed itself to the people of Britain. Most muggles were leaving their nice, orderly homes and climbing into their cleanly washed vehicles to battle the other commuters doing the exact same thing. Horns would honk, people would become agitated, words were spoken in anger, and yet the sun still ascended into the sky as light, fluffy clouds slowly drifted to the east.

The magical world was stirring as well. Witches and wizards were leaving their eccentric homes for work or sitting down to breakfast with their children a few last precious times before they returned to Hogwarts for another year. Hesitant laughter could be heard as parents worried about their own. They worried about each other as the mother and father of fortunate families made eye contact. The future was so unknown and fear was running rampant.

As the noise of flying owls and various chirps or screeches were heard in Magical kitchens everywhere, a guilty cheer went up. Letters were written, floo calls were made, and visits were planned as the news spread. One family in particular cracked open the finest bottle of champagne they had on hand and rejoiced as revenge had finally been achieved even if they hadn't meted it.

When Tonks rolled over, the sun pained her eyes enough that she groaned. As she prepared herself for the act of opening her eyes, Nymphadora stretched out her arms and legs feeling for the man next to her. She found the comforting feel of flesh and curled into it eagerly. Finally her eyes fluttered open and she saw the puffy clouds lazily roll by the window. "Beautiful day, today."

Harry heard her words and sighed while pulling her close to him. "That only means something bad will happen, Nymph."

"Bright ray of sunshine you are," Tonks chided. "Care to set my hair on fire too while you are being so cheery? Might make for a nice distraction to your optimistic view of the day."

"I am just saying..." Harry tried to fix the mood but was stifled by Tonks' lips on his.

"Hush you sexy thing," Tonks scolded before attacking him. The events of that *night* were still on her mind and she owed her life to Harry. The more she thought about it, the more Tonks became attracted to him. "There is no turn-on better than having your life saved by a sexy man."

When Harry's mind caught up, he processed what had been said. "What if I had been ugly?"

Tonks laughed into his neck as she nuzzled him. "Thank Merlin that didn't happen."

"No, really?" Harry pressed.

"I might have given you a kiss and left it at that," Tonks joked. "Not as much fun as shagging your brains out is it?"

Harry answered the only way he could in his hopeful state of mind, "Nope."

The playful banter and kissing continued until Hedwig appeared in the room. She bore a few letters and a copy of the Prophet and a bored and slightly annoyed stare for Harry. He shook his head and tried to coax her down to him. She resisted his efforts by continuing her glare. Harry wasn't really motivated to read what he had been sent since he had noticed the edge of the Daily Prophet but called her down anyway. Relenting, Hedwig puffed out her chest once and finally flew to Harry. He removed the burden and flipped through them. He kept the letter from Hermione and Ginny on his side of the bed before dropping the paper and another letter into Tonks' lap.

As expected, Ginny wanted to know how he was doing and asked him to stop at their house as soon as he could. She mentioned something about Mrs. Weasley worrying about him, but Harry knew that she wasn't the only one in the house thinking about his well-being. Hermione's was very business like and couldn't have been more direct and to the point than if Horace had written the letter for her. Harry was instructed to visit and prove that he wasn't depressed. With a chuckle, he got out of the bed and walked to the loo in search of a toothbrush. It was one muggle habit that he hadn't resorted to using magic in the place of.

"Ginny and Hermione need a visit and soon if I read the letters correctly," Harry stated as he entered the bathroom.

"The Prophet published the fact that Bellatrix is dead, finally," Tonks told him with a smirk. *"With cause unknown, Bellatrix Lestrage was reported dead late Sunday evening while attempting to subvert the Magical community. The Ministry has been tight lipped about how she died and where she was found. All we know is that You-Know-Who's most vicious Death Eater is no longer a threat to us."*

"I guess Marcus decided that her death should be made public," Tonks pondered. "It might help us fight them if everyone knows they aren't invincible." Harry grunted in response as he exited the bathroom with a toothbrush in his mouth. Tonks smiled and flipped the page. A humungous smile grew on her face as she flipped a few pages in quick succession. "We made the paper, dear."

Harry scowled and sucked back in some of the toothpaste that had managed to escape his mouth. "They are wonderful pictures too. My rear looks quite perky in most of them and we are either holding hands or kissing. I am keeping this copy for my scrapbook."

Harry had retreated back into the cold confines of the bathroom and spit out the used toothpaste. "Scrapbook?"

"Of course a scrapbook," Tonks called out to him. "I may not act like a girl all that often, but I have my moments and us in the paper is one of those moments."

"Bloody women," Harry huffed quietly as the ramifications rolled around in his head.

"I heard that, Mister," Tonks yelled good-naturedly.

Harry expected the comment and let it slide. If he was in trouble, he would find out shortly. As he cleaned his face and had a quick shave, Harry noticed the lack of noise coming from Tonks. "Nymph?" he left the bathroom and found Tonks staring at the other letter he had given her. She ignored him and stared at the letter in her hands with her mouth open and her eyes bugging out noticeably. "Nympie?"

"My parents want to meet you," Tonks told him still in shock. "Today, no exceptions." She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. "You cursed the day, you know that, with all your negative emotions."

"How bad can it be, Nymph," Harry said before he thought it over. "Oh shite."

"Oh shite is right," Tonks added. "You are going to meet the parents of the girl you have been sleeping with. But that is nothing compared to the fact that I am going to be meeting my parents after they found out, from the Prophet no less, that I have been dating you. I am in for it."

"It won't be that bad, Nymph," Harry tried to convince her although if pressed he would admit that it was himself he was trying to convince.

"Now who is singing a different tune?" Tonks asked and then answered her own question with a frown. "Both of us. Damn clouds and sun why can't it be dark and dreary like I feel."

A quiet breakfast was eaten as Tonks laid out the plan for the day. They were going to visit Hermione first, then the Weasleys, and finally the Tonks's. "If we work this just right, we can stop in after dinner and be out of there in less than two hours. My mum might corner us by then, but not if we keep moving. The trick is to use my dad as a shield for my mum. For the most part, you should be safe since you are, you. I am a dead woman though if she gets her way."

"They can't be worse than the Dursleys," Harry contrasted. "I think we will be safe enough." Harry's fear had lessened to the point that his anticipation of meeting Tonks' parents took over. He was going to meet her family, a magical family, that wasn't the Weasleys. Harry had always learned something when meeting magical people. Sometimes the things were good; sometimes they were bad.

With his broom shrunk and tucked into his pocket, Harry and Tonks Apparated to Hermione's or at least the park nearby. They walked around watching the children play and laugh with each other. A few parents followed Tonks' movements closely as her pink hair stood out among the normal colours of everyone else. They crossed the street and with a thought, Harry saw Hermione's house appear before him.

As they approached the stoop, Harry steeled himself for the barrage of questions that he was going to be inundated with.

A quick knock on the door and sounds from inside told Harry that at least two people were home. When the door opened, Harry saw Jane and greeted her warmly. They had just entered the house when hurried steps were heard above them.

“Mum!” Hermione yelled. “Don’t open the door until I get there. They could be Death Eaters.”

Just as a pair of feet rushed down the stairs and the tip of a wand angled towards the door, Harry spoke out. “I doubt many Death Eaters would knock and wait for someone to answer the door, Hermione.”

Once the bushy haired girl saw the pair, her anxiousness evaporated and was replaced by a genuine smile. In an efficient way and a sincere tone, she answered, “Constant vigilance, Harry.”

Harry nodded to her and couldn’t help but agree with the statement. “At least you didn’t curse first and then figure out if we were dangerous.”

Hermione finished descending the stairs and pulled Harry into a hug. She looked at Tonks and sighed when the other woman smiled and nodded in answer to the unasked question. “I may be a little paranoid, but I haven’t become like Moody yet.” Releasing Harry, she looked him in the eyes. “How are you doing and don’t tell me you are fine. I am not going to let you get away with that one this year. If I have to curse you into a stupor to get an honest answer, I will. I can brew Veritaserum if I must.”

Harry held his arms up and retreated back to Tonks’ side. “I am fine, Hermione. Only this time, I mean it. Tonks has helped me with my normal way of reacting to these kinds of things, and I am doing much better. I had to make a choice and I made the right one. I’m, I don’t know, at peace with it.”

Hermione looked at Tonks and saw her confirmation of Harry’s statement. “Far too young to comment about such a thing being

common,” Jane said looking sad and worried. She reached out and ran her hand against the side of Harry’s face. “Far too young.”

Harry lowered his head before speaking. “It is what it is and I have to live on. I will not let them dictate my life with their form of terror. I will not let them win even that much.”

Hermione smiled, “That is the Harry we need. Never give up; never give in.”

The visit with the Grangers was short and compressed since Harry knew the Weasleys were going to take much of his day. The sheer number of them led him to expect an all-day affair with the possibility of crying and, with any luck, Quidditch.

With a wave and a smirk, Harry and Tonks drifted across the street in front of Hermione’s home and Apparated to the Weasley’s. Harry had suggested the back garden for safety and some level of concealment. Prior to Disapparating, Tonks told him that the ward over the Weasley’s had been keyed to let the both of them through. “It lets us in whether it is by Apparition or portkey. Easier than blocking each way separately you know.”

“Uh, right,” Harry responded before projecting himself into the back garden of the oddly shaped house. They appeared, one silently and one with a soft pop, and were met with a few screams and a couple wands pointed in their direction. “Nymph, down!” Harry ordered as he threw his body over hers and drew his wand bringing it to bear on the people aiming at him.

“It’s only Harry!” A female voice yelled putting her hand and wand in the air. “Harry, you surprised us,” Ginny hurriedly said before spells started volleying about.

From his position on the ground covering Tonks completely and a spell rolling in his mind, Harry lowered his wand from the nearest target to him; Ron. Harry let out the breath he had inhaled and pushed the words of the spell out of his mind carefully.

Ron stared wide-eyed at Harry’s wand as the slight glow faded. “Bloody hell,” Ron uttered, mind blank. Molly didn’t scold her

youngest son for the curse as she was completely taken aback by Harry's reaction and speed. "Uh, what spell were you going to use, Harry?" Ron managed to ask as he settled back into the rickety chair he had been sitting in seconds before. A normal, large Weasley lunch sat on the table waiting to be consumed.

Harry put the pieces together and guessed that the family had elected to take an early lunch in their back garden. His guess would explain why Molly, Ginny, and Ron were seated around the table no more than a few feet from where they Apparated in. "You don't want to know, mate."

"Uh, humour me then?" Ron asked lamely.

Harry shook his head but reluctantly answered his friend, "You wouldn't have the same problem as Nearly Headless Nick."

"I wouldn't be dead?"

Harry looked away and pulled himself off of his girlfriend and helped her up. "You wouldn't be 'nearly' headless," Harry said quickly hugging Tonks once before trying to distract them all. "Great day for a picnic isn't it?"

Ginny joined him in attempting to move beyond the near disaster and joined them. She gave Harry a long hug before sharing a shorter one with Tonks. Molly had returned her wand to her apron slowly and stood in preparation to mother Harry to within an inch of his life. Ron used the seconds available to process what Harry had meant. "Oh cock."

"Ronald Weasley!" Molly yelled. "You will not use that kind of language around your sister or me. You know better young man."

"Sorry, mum," Ron said automatically as if it was a common thing to say.

"How did you get here?" Ginny asked when her mother elbowed her out of the way so she could reach Harry.

Completely wrapped up in a Molly hug, Harry thought up a way to explain his appearance. When Molly moved back, she waited for an answer too. Harry looked at all of them nervously before averting his eyes to the ground in front of him. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other trying desperately to give an answer that didn't sound really stupid. A jab from Tonks' elbow spurred him on. "We Apparated," Harry said quietly and tried to start a different conversation.

The matriarch was having none of it. "Excuse me, Harry, but did you say Apparated?"

Caught and stuck, Harry looked to Tonks for help and found...her laughing at him. "Can duel Bellatrix and win, but you get all flummoxed when asked how you get around. Harry, Harry, Harry."

The cute, pink-haired woman was given a playful scowl as Harry nodded in affirmation. "How can you Apparate?" Ginny asked ignoring his hesitation.

"Tonks showed me," Harry responded. "It isn't all that hard to do really. You just mentally project yourself where you want to be. It took me an afternoon to get the basics it I think."

Ron and Ginny eyed him eagerly hoping for lessons on the skill while Molly frowned like only a mother could. "You could have been splinched not to mention that you aren't of age and you could be expelled or even arrested for trying it without a license."

"Molly," Tonks interrupted, "Go on Harry, show them."

Shrugging, Harry Apparated behind Ron and tapped him on the shoulder. Ron spun in his seat causing the chair to creek dangerously before leaping to his feet and jumping backwards with his mouth hanging open. Harry disappeared and reappeared behind Ginny who had turned around at the same time as Ron. He reached out and tickled Ginny's sides before vanishing and reappearing next to Molly. "See, Mrs. Weasley," Harry spoke softly as everyone focused on his new location, "no splinching, no letters, no trouble."

Molly's hand had sprung to her chest in shock. "But, you are silent. How can you be silent? You are only a child and just beginning to Apparate."

Harry looked to Tonks who was wearing a knowing smile. "Molly, never underestimate Harry."

"What's the big deal, mum?" Ginny asked. "Can't Dumbledore Apparate silently?"

"Yes, he can, dear," Molly told Ginny. "And a few others in the world too, but Harry as well?" Molly seemed a little apprehensive and had to fight against the realization she had just been let in on. Tonks placed her hand on the mother's shoulder and patted it gently.

"Harry is still the same person you always tried to feed to the point of bursting, Molly," Tonks knew she needed to distract the woman quickly. "And he is also the man I have been spending the summer with." Tonks broke away from Molly after her last comment and herded the children back towards the table ignoring the sputtering that was occurring behind her. Under her breath, Tonks whispered to Harry, "You owe me one for jumping in front of that train just now. She will hassle me all day long about corrupting you and being too old. As if I won't get enough of that when we see my mum later."

Molly directed Harry into a spare seat at the table next to Ginny and pushed a freshly laden plate in front of him without saying a word. The order was obvious and Harry complied instantly trying to appease the mother and save his girlfriend from touchy questions. The meal was eaten and conversation was limited as Molly spent most of her time just watching Harry. Ginny leaned in and asked about the Prophet article.

Harry waved it off. "It will be old news in a day or two," Harry answered finishing off his dessert. "I'm not worried."

The intelligent redhead read between the lines and Harry's facial expression. "It is nothing you haven't dealt with before, Harry."

"True, but they have pictures of us and so many people will talk about her being older," Harry worried. "In a few years no one would notice

or care about our ages, but right now that will be all they see. I am happy and I care about her. Why can't they leave it at that?"

"Harry," Ginny consoled him with a touch of humour to her voice, "you have never cared about what others think. Why start now?"

"Because, I'm not alone in this. She goes where I go," Harry looked across the table at Tonks who was involved in a conversation or argument with Molly. "It is bad enough she is a target because she is with me, but now the rest of the Magical world will notice her. She deserves better than that."

Ginny shook her head and patted Harry's hand. "She has you. Doesn't get much better than that if you ask me." Ginny froze for a second before shrugging to herself and eating the last of her ice cream.

Harry heard her words and, with his new level in understanding of women, took a chance to respond. "I'm sorry I never saw you as a potential girlfriend, Ginny. If it wasn't one thing or another, there was always the risk of losing your family if something bad happened between us. I had never had a family before."

Ginny stopped him before he talked himself into trouble. "Harry, I am okay with it. You are happy and that is what I always wanted for you." Ginny looked at Tonks and her mum arguing over something and had a good idea what it was about. "Besides, you aren't married yet." She quirked her eyebrow at Harry as she moved her chair back and stood. "Care for some Quidditch? Such a great day to fly around."

Harry took the opportunity to avoid dangerous territory and nodded his acceptance of the offer. "Mate, Quidditch," Harry called to Ron while he pulled out his shrunken broom and enlarged it. With a firm kick off, Harry shot away from the ground as fast as his broom could take him. He soared over the tree tops scaring half a dozen birds who had also been enjoying the clear day until Harry happened. The feathered animals scattered in all directions fleeing for their lives from a partially-possessed young man.

Harry felt his heart lurch at the freedom and ease with which he flew. A few casual loops around rogue branches and a couple impromptu

dives left Harry completely at peace with himself. A light breeze moved his hair as the sun warmed his exposed skin. A lazy cloud floated off near the horizon as Harry's eyes followed it. *'Much better than being stuck in an office doing paperwork,'* Harry figured out as he came to terms with his possible career choices. *'Definitely Quidditch.'*

His daydream was cut short when a flittering golden ball zipped passed his head en route to a location away from people. His eyes tracked the snitch until he was shouldered out of the way by another person. Catching his balance in time to prevent a fall, Harry refocused his concentration on the retreating back of a redhead pursuing the object. "Oh no you don't, Weasley!"

As Tonks and Molly watched from the safety of the ground, Harry lowered himself to his broom and took off after Ginny as Ron ascended into the air to join them. "He loves flying so much," Tonks said. "He will be one of the best Seekers the game has ever seen in a few years."

With a sniffle, Molly answered, "If he makes it that long."

Tonks turned and stared the woman down with a burning glare. "How in the hell can you say that," Tonks ground out slowly.

"There is so much against him," Molly wept. "There are so many people out to get him, Tonks. He has an entire side of this war after him. They want him...dead. Harry, our Harry, our sweet, loving, dear, Harry."

Tonks swallowed as her own fears were voiced out loud. She forced the dreadful images in her mind away. "And that is why I refused to let this summer be another in a series of shitty summers. I wouldn't let Dumbledore ruin it. I wouldn't let those pathetic muggles ruin it. I wouldn't let him ruin it. Losing Sirius almost broke him beyond recovery. If that had happened there would be no reason to continue all of this."

Molly brushed away the few tears that had escaped before she regained control of herself. "What do you mean, Tonks?"

A moment's thought left Tonks scrambling for a response. "What do you think Harry's future is in this thing? To sit on the sidelines and watch? Maybe plan a battle or two? Harry is a fighter. His entire life has been one fight after another either for love and respect or his own precious life. The other day should have shown you what Harry is made of."

Molly thought of the events of that night, her first real time thinking about them, and she puzzled for minutes on it. "He was brilliant. He never let his guard down not once. He..."

"Killed that bitch with a little deception and quick thinking," Tonks finished for her. "Harry is as soft and fragile as you know him to be but corner him or threaten a friend and he will strike with a terrible vengeance. I have worked with some of the most frightening and lethal individuals in the business, and I can say for a fact that Harry has no equal when adequately threatened. The fire in his eyes can sear your soul if you are against him."

"But, You-Know-Who is..." Molly stammered as she thought of how Harry could become the person Tonks was describing to her.

"Nothing compared to Harry," Tonks corrected. "Voldemort may have all of the murderers and evil people in Britain on his side, but they can't compete with Harry. He has more heart in him than all the others combined. They fight for money and power; Harry fights for friends and those he loves. He might not have known for sure what love was before this summer, but he knows what it is now. You only have to look into his eyes and you can see it. The, I don't know, 'drive' inside of him is so great that we could never understand what it is like to be Harry Potter."

"What do you mean Tonks?" Molly asked beginning to feel a little scared.

Tonks turned away from watching Harry and looked Molly in the eyes. "Have you ever seen someone who could only be described as intense?" At Molly's nod, Tonks continued. "That is Harry in everything he does, except for school of course. He has too much of his father in him, so I hear, for that to happen not to mention Hermione needs some balancing factor in her life or we would lose

her to the library forever. He is intense. He has such purpose when he is motivated. It drives me 'crazy' when he is like that, if you get my meaning."

"Tonks!" Molly scolded. "He is only a boy and you are a woman."

Still feeling playful, Tonks retorted. "He is a man, Molly, and has been for a number of weeks now." Molly reacted as Tonks had hoped and looked ready to attack. The only thing that saved the auror were her next words. "Harry relives his mother's death every time Dementors get near him. He saw Cedric killed in front of him. He saw Sirius die. He has faced Voldemort in person." Tonks sniffed once, "He killed Bellatrix to save my life. You didn't see his eyes, Molly. They said so much to me in just a few seconds. He would have given himself to her in exchange for me. Me! I am nobody special. I am just a foolish little girl who got older and fell in love with Harry Potter. I, I, I'm so completely at a lost when it comes to him. He is not a boy at heart."

Molly heard the young woman's words and couldn't help but try to soothe her. "But you are someone special. Harry thinks the world of you. I may not agree with the age difference, but Harry has made his choice and I will support him as if he is my own child. How could I not? He saved my husband's life. He saved Ginny's life, bless him forever. He helped Ron grow up, and the twins to never grow up. I still need to yell at him for that one. He is a member of this family whether by name or not. He is loved by us all."

"I have seen the amount of love he has in him, Molly," Tonks said. "I have felt it in my heart and my head. Harry can not lose as long as he has that driving him. That night in the alley was the first time in his life that he told someone he loved them. He figured it all out right then. I saw him as he did it. The Imperius had nothing on him then; I can assure you of that."

Molly listened and heard the intent behind Tonks' words. "I watched him today when you arrived. He put himself between you and us without thinking. He did the same thing in the alley. He ran ahead and put himself between them and us. He is so selfless; I am worried about him doing it again and losing. He might have made it this long,

but it can't last forever. I am afraid of him doing it one too many times."

"Harry will always do it, Molly," Tonks informed the worried mother. "He can not be stopped when someone he cares about is threatened. I said it before, and I will say it again. Harry can do anything if properly motivated. I love him more than my own life. I owe him my life, and I will gladly offer it to save him. Trouble is, Harry won't hear of it. He would tear through a legion of Death Eaters to save me, you, or any of your children really. He knows what love is now and won't let it get away. He doesn't see what is safe or practical or in his best interests. Harry only sees what is right and not right."

"Oh that silly boy is going to worry me to death isn't he?" Molly fretted.

"With all the love he can manage," Tonks prefaced, "yes. He knows no other way. And that is why I know he is going to survive this. He won't let it be any other way and neither will anyone else around him. Do you know that he is the only guy, other than my father, to have seen the real me since I was eight? I learned early on to hide who I was behind my gift. Then one day, Harry asked to see what I really look like. It was such a direct and honest request that I showed him. For the first time since I learned about being a metamorph, I have spent more time these last few weeks in my normal form than with any adjustments. And I can't help it."

"He is such a dear, isn't he?" Molly asked with a knowing smile. The pair went silent as they watched the children flying above them.

Harry flew after Ginny on her third frantic chase for the snitch. Dodging a tree branch that appeared as Ginny cut a tight corner, Harry saw that she was chasing nothing. "Good try, Ginny!" Harry shouted before spinning in place like a top and shooting off in the opposite direction.

"I had you for a minute, Harry!" Ginny called after him before he was out of earshot.

The two had to avoid Ron on several occasions as he did his best to chase after the elusive object. Ron's large body fit best in the Keeper position he hoped to maintain for the upcoming season. Harry's

increase in mass over the summer slowed him down a little, but it also made him harder to knock around while in flight. It was a fact that Ginny tested and discovered quickly when it was her spiraling out of control and not Harry after a shoulder block during a particularly contact-heavy chase.

For the fifth time, Ginny found her course altered as Harry drifted in front of her. "I used to be able to hold my own against you, but now I can't. What happened?"

As Harry slowed slightly and let Ginny come up along side of him, he thought up an answer. "This summer has been very productive, Ginny. It has been wonderful all things considered."

"Besides learning to Apparate and...other things," Ginny corrected before mentioning something best left unspoken. "What else have you been up to?"

"This and that," Harry answered searching for the snitch again since he had lost sight of it.

"And how many of those things made it into the paper?"

"Far too many," Harry replied seeing a glint of gold on the other side of the clearing. "Sorry, Ginny." Harry took off closing the distance with the object and snatched it out of the air before his only real competition had made it half way after him.

"Bugger," Ginny said turning to Ron. "Time to switch positions and give Ron something to do for a change."

Ron had heard his sister's words and gave her a dirty look. "Oi, I heard that. You just try and get one past me." Ron changed his direction and flew over to the hoops they had fashioned. In a quick succession of moves, Ginny scooped up the Quaffle, gave Ron a few false moves, and scored a shot in the lower left hoop.

"You were saying, brother?" Ginny challenged wearing a smirk and pulling her hair back into a twist since her old one had fallen out from her aggressive flying with Harry.

Ron bristled and accepted the challenge without hesitation. Harry saw the look the brother and sister had shared and knew he was only going to be a distraction for them, so he flew down to Molly and Tonks and accepted the glass of pumpkin juice that was put into his hand before his feet had even touched the ground. "Thanks, Mrs. Weasley."

Harry was going to sit in another chair but Tonks pulled him into hers and settled in his lap after he was comfortable. She placed a few soft kisses on his lips before hugging him tightly. "Love you."

Harry felt his heart soar at the words. "Love you too." He held the beautiful woman in his arms and closed his eyes. He breathed in her scent and let it out slowly enjoying the feel of her in his arms. He was having a great day.

"I am happy for you, Harry, dear," Molly said from her seat next to them. "I still think you are too young for her, but if I learned anything from my own sons it was that they rarely listen to me when I tell them things they should hear. So I will only say that you should take your time here. Do not be in a rush to grow up even more than you already have."

Harry thought about her comments and formulated an answer. "Mrs. Weasley, I am not looking to grow up, I am hoping to live. I am having a great summer and I'm not with the Dursleys. Anything more than that and I'm a very lucky man."

Molly huffed before her face slowly shifted to a smile. "If you are happy, I am happy for you Harry, dear. You deserve some good in your life."

With a true smile on his face, Harry slid out from under Tonks, kissed her, and returned to the quickening war raging above them. Ron's taunts had become more personal and referenced embarrassing childhood occurrences pushing Ginny to aim for his head instead of the hoops.

"I have never seen him this happy?" Molly said.

“He said as much to me,” Tonks revealed as she watched Harry attempt to referee the two-person match overhead. “Uh, Molly, Ron and Ginny seem to be less-than playful.”

Molly followed Tonks pointing finger to her youngest children. “Oh, well, don’t repeat this but Ginny can take care of herself when it comes to her brothers. She has always kept them in line when it was needed. Bill stood up for her until he left for Egypt, but by then Ginny had learned how to handle the others. I too came from a family of brothers where you have to learn how to fight with the best of them. There is a reason the twins respect her and rarely make her a target of their musings.”

“Why is that?” Tonks asked with a conspiratorial air to her question.

“I only know that she was nine and the twins did anything she asked that summer,” Molly offered. “It would seem she has sworn the pair to secrecy over the matter though. Trust me; I have tried to find out the details and failed. Not very Weasley of me, I know, but I my excuse is that I only married into the family.”

The sun rolled further towards the horizon as the Quidditch game slowed down. Ron learned that Ginny was more than capable of scoring goals when she wanted and was going to be a shoe-in for Chaser in the upcoming season. Harry showed that he could manage playing Chaser in a pinch, but his new size moved him more in-line with professional Seeker standards. A couple hours before dinner was going to be ready, Harry pulled them out-of-sight so he could show them something.

“Harry,” Ginny asked coyly, “what are we doing out here?”

Harry smiled a mischievous smirk before Apparating behind them instantly. “How about a quick lesson? Not that you will get it right away, but you have a chance to think about how to do it before you are taught properly. I only needed to know what to do, what it felt like, and the proper motivation to get it.”

“Cool,” Ron said eager to try it out.

“And what was your motivation, Harry?” Ginny asked smirking worse than if she had beaten Malfoy in a fist fight herself.

Harry stuttered for a second as he thought up an answer. “That is a private moment between Tonks and myself thank you very much.”

Harry Apparated each of them a few times so they could get used to the sensation and he instructed them on the correct mental exercises to use for the spell. After an hour of tutoring, Harry was satisfied there had been no real accidents and of the progress both students had made.

Ginny had jumped into the lesson without looking back and found herself being held back by Harry a few times from actually attempting to Apparate. Harry’s reasoning was the fact that he had no idea on how to reverse any mistakes that could be made. Ron, on the other hand, had grown hesitant in his efforts after getting mad at Ginny for a comment she had made. During his rant, his focus was divided and the pinky finger on his left hand disappeared for a few seconds before slowly reappearing. Harry chose not to press the subject since he was glad that they had all retained their own body parts at the end.

They wondered back to the house and found that the twins and Bill were home. Harry greeted all three with a hand shake and a smile. Bill regarded Harry carefully looking for any signs of trauma or other emotional issues that he knew could occur after the events of the weekend. Surprisingly, he found Harry engaging and happy. During dinner Harry would go quiet every so often, but the moment would pass and he would back to normal.

Arthur arrived right about the same time Molly was setting the food on the table and was welcomed by a chorus of, “Hi Dad,” or “About time, dear.” He watched Harry and Tonks sit at one end of the table and converse with his family. He couldn’t help but feel proud of how Harry had dealt with the last few months of his life. So many things had went wrong and there was little Harry could do to control them.

In a private moment with his wife after the meal, Arthur found a free minute to speak with her. “He’s doing well, dear.”

“He is, isn’t he?” Molly said looking out the kitchen window spying her children still sitting around the table laughing about something the twins had caused no doubt. “I hate to admit it, but Tonks has a lot to do with how well he has weathered the summer. You know I can’t think about those muggles without risking being locked away. The things they did to him...”

“Molly,” Arthur soothed his worried spouse, “you know that if Harry wanted them punished, he could do it. A few well placed comments around the right people and the Dursleys would be flooded by Ministry personnel looking into everything that had to do with Harry. I have a feeling that a couple of our sons have even been told to leave them alone. Dumbledore keeps the Order in line on this, but Harry has the rest of them holding back or in the dark.”

“It shouldn’t all be on his shoulders though,” Molly fretted. “He should be sixteen and worrying about girls and Quidditch.” Her eyes followed the raven haired boy as he walked with Ron over to the garden where a few adventurous gnomes scurried about. She could see Harry constantly keeping tabs on Tonks who was involved in a rather expressive conversation with the twins and Ginny.

“Seems to me that he has the girl part down,” Arthur said with a chuckle.

“But she is...”

“Just what he needs as far as I can tell,” Arthur interrupted. “She is fun and outgoing. Both things Harry has lacked for very specific reasons. Who else could get Harry to kiss her in public and in front of the cameras? They knew those reporters were there. She got him to live a little and not worry about the rest of it.”

The parents watched the couple in question gravitate towards each other and share an embrace. Once the remainder of the meal had been dealt with, both joined the younger crowd outside to enjoy the fading light as gnomes were acrobatically removed from the garden.

After Harry finished pitching the last of the gnomes in his area over the hedge, he drew his wand and cleaned his hands without a thought. Ron and Ginny watched his movements with anxious stares

waiting for the time when they could do the same. As the conversation slowed, Tonks grew more quiet and pensive. "What is it?" Harry asked.

"About time to make our last visit," Tonks said quietly but was overheard by George.

"And who is the lucky person you are visiting tonight?" George asked loudly and was rewarded with a similar pair of fearful looks.

"My parents," Tonks spoke firmly in a resolute manner. "The Prophet kind of let the cat out of the bag on this one. I was ordered home to be yelled at."

"Oh," George replied in an eager way.

"Got your wand on you Harry?" Fred asked enjoying the situation unfolding before him.

"Yes he does," Ron answered for him. "Scary when he points that thing at you."

"It won't be that bad," Ginny tried to sympathize.

"My mum was still a Black," Tonks clarified. "Don't forget that. She can be as mean as she wants to be. It runs in the family as sure as red hair does for you."

Goodbyes were exchanged, as were hugs, and a funeral march hummed by the twins along with a few fake tears. Harry and Tonks stood together in the back garden as the Weasleys watched. "Harry, will yourself to follow me, okay? Do everything you do to Apparate but don't have a location in your mind. Just follow me. Understand?"

"Sure," Harry said automatically hoping he would do it right.

With a soft pop, Tonks disappeared quickly followed by a silently disappearing Harry. "He was silent," Arthur said as the Weasleys drifted back inside.

Harry and Tonks appeared on a quickly darkening street that would look at home in any nice, outer London suburb. The lawns were well maintained as were the hit-and-miss fences scattered about the neighborhood. All of the homes were single family dwellings with at least a few feet between their neighbors. Hermione's home could fit in well, but it would easily be the most expensive house on the block. Tonks pulled Harry along the street and towards the south end of the cul-de-sac.

Harry watched for anyone moving about, but he found it to be relatively quiet with most open windows curtained. A grey house on the east side of the circle seemed to be Tonks target for them as they got closer with each step. Harry felt Tonks tense and saw her stand a little taller and thrust her chest out. It looked as if she was readying for a fight.

Once they reached the stoop, Harry pulled back on her hand stopping them completely. He turned her until she met his eyes. "I love you. No matter what is said or done, that won't change here."

Tonks searched his face for something Harry couldn't figure out. "I know, Harry, but I am glad you said it. Thank you, and I love you too." Tonks turned back to the house and breathed out deeply. "Here goes nothing." She climbed the set of steps and knocked on the door. Her hand was firmly in Harry's and she refused to let go until they were both in the house. Thoughts of '*Stand united*' came to Harry's mind as he waited for someone to greet them.

The door opened to reveal an average looking man with a slight paunch and a fading hairline wearing an aged t-shirt and worn blue jeans. "Nymphadora, sweetie, come in." Tonks wasted no time in returning the welcoming smile and entering the home.

"Thanks, dad," Tonks quipped quickly as she pulled Harry inside not trusting her luck any longer than she already had. "This is Harry, but you knew that already."

"Honey," Ted Tonks said softly, "your mother has been going spare since she found out. At least an owl would have taken away one of her yelling points, but you never were one to write home much."

"I have been busy," Tonks offered as her only excuse.

"Theodore Tonks," Ted introduced himself to Harry offering his hand. "But call me Ted or the Mrs. will take the mickey out of me all night."

Harry shook hands while his left remained firmly in the grasp of his girlfriend. "Harry Potter, but please call me Harry."

"Have a seat before she figures out that you are here," Ted ushered them into the living room and to the couch. Harry and Tonks sat together and as close as they could while Ted sat down in a very comfortable looking chair just inside the doorway. A noise from above them signaled that there was at least one other person in the house. "She might have figured out that we have guests. It should be any moment now."

With a crack, a woman about as tall as Tonks Apparated into the living room facing her husband. She wore a light blue cloak with silver trim and her long brown hair came to the middle of her back. "Are they here yet?" She asked her husband.

"I don't know, dear," Ted said airily. He leaned to the side and asked, "Are you guys here yet or do you want me to tell her five more minutes?"

Andromeda spun around instantly and Harry saw that at least some of Tonks' beauty was inherited from her mother. "Nymphadora, why didn't you tell me the second you got here?" Harry was trying to read the woman but found that even though her voice was level and at a normal volume, she was holding back a lot of emotion.

"Mum, you know that dad and I like a few minutes to hang out before you show up and do your thing."

"My thing, young lady, is what mothers do," Andromeda responded.

"Pry and take charge of things?" Tonks bantered back.

"If it suits me, yes," was the mother's answer.

"Fine," Tonks stood dragging Harry with, "Mother, this is Harry; Harry this is my mother. Now get on with the yelling so we can make this visit quick and less trying."

"First off, Nymphadora," Andromeda started in much the same way Molly would begin a tirade, "I find out you are seeing someone from the bloody paper no less. Second, it seems to be something more than a passing fling judging by the pictures. And third, no offense to you, Mr. Potter, but it is Harry Potter. Did you forget how to work an owl? Did you run out of floo powder? Is there an Anti-Apparition ward on the neighborhood?"

Tonks smiled at Ted and counted off her fingers. "I am seeing someone, it isn't a passing thing, it is Harry, no, no, and no. There, all caught up. So glad we could do this. Until next month then?" Tonks stood only to be pushed back into her seat by her mother.

"We aren't through," she spoke as if Tonks had just set fire to the house. "We haven't even begun. We..." Andromeda paused as she looked at Tonks more carefully. She turned to Ted with a shocked look on her face. "When were you going to point it out?"

"When you stopped for a second and realized it yourself," Ted answered reaching for a bowl of muggle candies that was sitting on a sturdy table near his chair.

Harry leaned over to Tonks and asked, "Realized what, Nymph?"

Harry's movement caught both parent's attention, but his words crystallized their attention. "That my daughter looks as she is supposed to. As she did when she was home for the summer or relaxing with us without a care in the world. And the fact that she didn't yell at me to stop using her full name. I was so worked up I didn't notice."

"And she sees the light," Ted announced popping a few candies in his mouth and ignoring the scowl his wife gave him.

"Mother, this is Harry," Tonks offered and released his left hand for the first time.

Harry stood and shook hands with Andromeda for the first time. "Pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Tonks."

Andromeda held onto his hand after the gesture had finished and looked at him carefully. "How did you get her to stop hiding her natural beauty?"

"Um, I asked," Harry said lamely not sure how else to say it.

Andromeda turned to Tonks and eyed her carefully. "And why did him asking get results where my asking didn't?"

"Because," Tonks said proudly, "He wasn't family and he was sincere when he asked. Besides, mum, how could I not? Look at him! He is too cute for words."

Harry spun and looked at Tonks as if a Dementor had taken her place. She laughed at him and Andromeda joined her. "Steady there, Harry," Ted commented while putting his hand on Harry's shoulder. "Nymphadora lives for things like this. Weather the storm and plan your revenge for later. It is the only way to survive their kind."

Harry was completely confused and dropped into his seat. He watched Tonks and her mother laugh together. He had been set up. He had been set up and it had been good too. "Oh, you are an evil minx."

"You bet your arse I am," Tonks replied. "You really think my mother would be anything like Narcissa or Bellatrix?"

"I would hope not," Harry answered still in a haze of confusion. "One hates me half as much as she should and the other, well, you know."

Tonks wasted no time in joining Harry on the couch and hugging him instantly. She planted a kiss on his lips and looked him in the eyes. "That doesn't matter anymore. It is over."

Andromeda and Ted watched the byplay and waited for the answers they hoped would be forthcoming. Tonks and Harry looked at them and knew what needed to be done. "It is your story, Harry. Tell it if you want or not. They will respect your privacy if you want them too."

Harry thought about his options and knew he had to say something. "I got the bulk of the Black estate and Narcissa contested it. She lost, badly. Bellatrix...she threatened the wrong person. Tonks can tell you the rest of it." Harry went quiet and clung to Tonks hand for comfort. He wanted to be strong in front of the people in the room, but some things were still too fresh in his mind.

"Nymphadora?" Andromeda pressed carefully.

"We were at dinner," Tonks began the story listing off the attendees. "Death Eaters showed up and we fought them off. Bellatrix grabbed me and threatened to kill me. Harry tricked her and, well, you read the paper. They can't publish the facts for obvious reasons. He saved my life. This is not a passing fling if it isn't apparent."

"I would say not," Ted added. He offered his hand to Harry again. "Thank you. Our baby is everything to us."

Harry found himself wrapped in a hug from Andromeda after he stood and shook Ted's hand. "No more playing around," she whispered to him. "Before was all an act because Nymphie asked us to do it."

"No problem," Harry replied letting his negative emotions drift back under his efforts at Occlumency. "I know a certain griffin that needs a play-pal this year while I am away at school." Harry's threat was met by a look of sheer terror on Tonks' face.

"You wouldn't dare," Tonks breathed. "You love me too much to do that to me."

Harry saw he had regained equal footing with her. "Maybe I do, but Jules needs a friend too."

"Let her have the elves," Tonks' voice rose to a high level. "I want nothing to do with that creature. No thank you, Mr. Potter."

Harry shared a smile with Ted as the father appreciated seeing the tables turned on his own daughter for once. With the ruse revealed, the night progressed with humour and embarrassing stories about Tonks growing up. Harry committed every one to memory as Tonks

spent much of her time holding her head in shame mumbling in hope about parents torturing their children being illegal in Britain.

When Harry left for the loo, Andromeda asked Tonks a question she couldn't hold back. "Nymphadora, how serious are you two?"

Tonks waited a few seconds before answering. "I love him. I have since the beginning. He calls me by my name and I like it. When others aren't around, I am in my normal form. On top of all that, he saved my life. He was going to trade his life for mine that night, no hesitation at all. In short, I am as serious as he wants to be. I can be patient on this for as long as is needed."

"Congratulations, honey," Andromeda said giving her daughter a motherly hug. "I am so happy for you. You finally found it. I told you, you would."

"A crying sixteen-year-old doesn't always understand things like that, mum."

"I know, but we all figure it out in the end."

When Harry returned from the loo and an impromptu tour of the house by Ted, he leaned in to Tonks and hugged her. "What is it, Harry?"

"Nothing much," he said tapping his scar once and shrugging. "Must be mad about something."

The evening ended with Harry and Tonks being walked down the stairs by the Tonkses. They shared hugs and handshakes and wished each other well.

"My, how heart warming of a scene we have here," called a cold and terrorizing voice. "Too bad I don't have a heart any longer."

Harry turned around in a blink, drawing his wand, and finding the source of the familiar voice. He thought up a series of spells to cast varying in the shields required to stop them. Harry's initial idea of attacking first and often was stopped before the Severing Ribbon left

his wand. "Voldemort, what poor timing you have. Kind of a habit for you isn't it?"

Harry saw Voldemort standing about twenty feet away on the far side of street. His black cloak fluttered in the light breeze that brushed the leaves of the trees above them against each other as if an orchestra was tuning their instruments. The evil man's bald head shone in the light of the half moon and the street lights overhead. His piercing red eyes tore through the night and blazed as brightly as any fire. Behind him stood three masked and cloaked Death Eaters. A round dumpy looking one could only be one person.

"Wormtail," Harry called calmly as if a mass murderer wasn't breathing the same air as him. "I see that you are never too far from your master. Afraid of getting stepped on by others when they aren't careful?"

"Harry, Harry, Harry," Voldemort sung in his sweetest voice. "I must admit I am surprised by your open animosity for those who are beneath you. Dumbledore would be very disappointed in you."

Andromeda and Ted had grabbed onto Tonks and attempted to drag her back towards the house but she resisted fiercely. A flash of silver emitted from Tonks' wand before it went as dark as the night that was seeping into their souls. Both parents watched as Harry continued his conversation unflinchingly.

"Dumbledore can think what he wants, Tom," Harry pressed and was rewarded with a twitch from the man before him. "I fight for my own now. I believe you heard about the latest?"

"My goal tonight was to kill the worthless blood trader behind you and her filthy mate as a way of hurting you," Voldemort explained as he paced slowly back and forth on the far sidewalk. "It seems someone has foreseen my plans and put up a few wards around this house. They are nothing of consequence, given time, but low and behold here you are. My ultimate goal in life right now. The only one to have survived me so many times. Your luck has to be at an end by now, Harry. Surely you are running out of human shields, both parents and a godfather. You wouldn't happen to have a godmother lying around waiting to jump out and save you per chance?"

"None that I know of, Tom," Harry answered watching Voldemort's posture carefully. "If I may ask, how are your finances lately?"

Voldemort laughed a shrill tone causing his followers to shy away from him. The only person who didn't move was Harry. "You have been a bother in that area as well, dear boy. You have found a new way to be even more troublesome than in the past." Voldemort was working himself up into a near fury. "You have caused problems you can not even begin to understand. Plans ruined, alliances disintegrated, faithfuls questioning my abilities; all because of you. Your pathetic mother is the cause of it all." Voldemort finished in a fuming storm that everyone could feel rippling on their skin.

"Oh, but there you are wrong, Tom," Harry pushed hoping for a reaction and he got it. Voldemort's control was slipping, comment by comment. "You are the cause of it. You killed them and you made me who I am. You took them from me so what did I have left? This isn't about power or revenge or anything else as cheap as that. I want to survive this and so far I am doing a good job at it. Wouldn't you agree?"

Voldemort inclined his head slightly. "Annoyingly good job of it, but it will come to an end soon, boy."

"Maybe," Harry relented but shot back immediately, "but Bellatrix won't be there to see it. She was your favourite, and now she is gone."

"Yes, and how did that happen, my boy? How did that come to pass?"

"Simple, Tom," Harry set up. "She threatened the wrong person." Harry squared his shoulders and stared the man down as his gaze turned cold and menacing. "Any future threats of the like will be met with the same response. I will kill them and not look back."

Voldemort became pensive as he processed the information. A smile grew on his face as he answered the challenge. "So, how did it feel, Potter? How did the power feel? The raw, unencumbered power of life and death at your fingertips. The touch of God and Merlin himself. Was it everything you expected it to be?"

Harry sighed and shook his head. He used his left hand to push Tonks behind him and back towards her parents. "I felt nothing until later. Then, I felt the anger, the hate, the sickness that you love so much. It was terrible but sadly something that wasn't avoidable at the time. You came here to hurt Tonks and me through her parents. Isn't that a little childish for you?"

"Oh my dear boy, that is exactly what I am." Voldemort said sweetly as he extended his hands out from his body in a pose that was frightening by all accounts. The confidence and sheer power of his presence ensured that all felt his being on the street that night. "I am the terror that all parents fear. I will kill man and woman, son and daughter if it will serve my purpose. Killing the two fools behind you would mean nothing to me as long as you suffer for it."

"And you failed, yet again, Tom." Harry caught one Death Eater move slightly to one side and closer to a bush. "I do not fear you like everyone else, Tom. I have fought you and survived. You can be beaten like any other."

Harry's words were met with an instant response. A red twisting light erupted from the Dark Lord's wand and struck a shimmering shape before him. The light slowed for a second before continuing on to Harry who had thrown up every shield he could manage. With the various levels of magic between him and Voldemort, Harry only felt a tickle from the Cruciatus Curse that had been cast. "Practicing your Tickle Charm, Tom? You must work on that one when you find the time."

Harry was hoping that his efforts wouldn't leave him in a worse way than if they had fled from the start. He saw the Message spell Tonks had sent and knew he needed to stall as long as possible. The fact that Voldemort didn't attack from the beginning showed Harry that it was possible to delay the impending fight for at least some amount of time.

"You will pay for your lack of respect, Potter," Voldemort shouted before he took control of his demeanor again. "I must commend the mage who weaved these wards. They are quite intricate."

"I will pass along your praise to those who erected them. I must say it was worth every Knut too. It's easy to remove a few charms from a long list and give them another address to work on. Only took a few days from what I was told."

The Tonkses heard what Harry said and had just begun to understand what he meant. Nymph smiled when she heard the gasp from her parents behind her as she slowly retreated as Harry had wanted.

"You have been most annoying this summer, Potter," Voldemort said evenly as if in a normal conversation with a passing acquaintance on the street. "What else have you been up to?"

"This and that," Harry answered catching sight of a team of Unspeakables appearing in the distant park via portkey. "How about a deal? You leave Wormtail for me to deal with and you can take Narcissa and whom ever else you brought over back to your hole to plan my death this year. There is no reason to embarrass yourself more than you have, Tom."

"Who do you think you are, Potter, to threaten me? I am the Dark Lord Voldemort and you are just a pathetic Half-Blood teenager."

"Do I remind you of someone? Is that why you chose me that night?" Harry watched the teams converge on the four and level their wands. "I am willing to fight. I will not run away again. Bellatrix learned that the hard way, Tom."

Voldemort raised his wand at the same time Harry raised his. They stood facing each other when Voldemort yelled, "Leave, trap."

The Unspeakables converged on the Death Eaters launching numerous spells at them at one time. The initial volley was all that was needed. A lamp post was destroyed as were a few bushes and a small tree. Narcissa and the other Death Eater Disapparated upon command leaving Voldemort and Wormtail to dodge the assault.

Harry fired a Reductor and a Severing spell at Wormtail missing with the first but landing the second neatly removing three fingers and a thumb from the traitor's silver hand. The Animagus's wand was

cleaved in half failing in a shower of coloured sparks. The silver bits fell to ground disappearing in a puff of grayish smoke. "Master!" Wormtail jumped and grabbed onto Voldemort as he slashed his wand at Harry one last time before disappearing with the rat in tow.

Harry erected his shields protecting himself and the family behind him from the dark spell fired at them. It crashed against the shields in a spectacularly bright burst of light nearly blinding the onlookers. "Damn it!" Harry yelled at the empty space before him, once the blinding light had faded, as the Unspeakables descended on the last place the enemy had been. "So close to getting at least one of them."

Harry turned to see Tonks rushing over to him. She ran her hands over his body checking for injuries and finding none. "You stupid, stupid, noble but stupid man. Yet again you put yourself between me and him. You need to stop doing that."

"When he stops showing up, I'll stop doing it, agreed?" Harry was answered with a kiss and a hug. Tonks handed him off to her parents who could only grab onto him and keep him in place. They didn't know what else to do, so they kept Harry where he was while Tonks walked over to the group of people in grey cloaks.

"Yes, that was who you think it was," Tonks spoke clearly doing her best not to slip. She put up her best auror front and continued, "Everyone is fine here. A few neighbors may have seen something, but the Ministry should be able to handle that. Please let one of them know on your way back if you will."

She turned around and ushered Harry and family back into the house. Once the door had been closed, she received a message from Horace requesting a quick meeting the next day.

Harry calmly guided Andromeda and Ted over to the couch he and Tonks had vacated minutes before. When the husband and wife settled into a comforting embrace, Harry turned to Tonks. "Nothing like a visit from Voldemort to liven up the evening. Too bad they got away at the end, I would have liked to see at least one Death Eater captured this summer." Harry did his best to play ignorant of the summer's events that normal people hadn't been told.

Andromeda and Ted looked from Harry who was being very aloof about the uninvited guests to Tonks who was nodding her head in understanding. "How can you be so, so, flippant about this? *'He'* was here. I saw him with my own eyes." Andromeda's voice drifted off as she puzzled over the reality.

"Well," Harry started off, "I am sure you are shocked and scared right now, but I am use to him trying to kill me. Actually, this was one of the least terrifying meetings I have had with him. Usually someone dies and everyone else gets hurts." Harry shrugged as he found a seat in a chair near the far wall. He looked around the room a few times before settling into a meditative state and working on his mental shields which were being lightly assaulted by Voldemort from wherever he ended up.

Andromeda turned to Tonks who simply checked them over for injuries. "Nymphadora?"

"Yes, mum," Tonks replied normally as she finished her inspection.

"How can you be calm?"

"Simple," Tonks answered curtly looking her in the eyes. "If Harry can handle this being the main target, I can handle it being an extra. I will not let him down when he needs me, and I know he wouldn't let me down. You just saw who Harry really is, mum. Where were we and where was Voldemort?"

Andromeda replayed the incident in her head, shuddering whenever she saw *'His'* face. "We were behind Harry."

"And Harry willingly took the chance of getting hit by the Cruciatus Curse to protect us," Tonks explained. "I am use to him doing things like this. And before you ask, no, you never expect it. Harry always puts himself in danger for others. Right frustrating too."

Ted watched the women in his life fret over the evening and the young man sitting in a chair against the wall. Even though Harry appeared to be sleeping while sitting up, Ted could see the tension in the man's body. He could only compare it to a cat waiting to pounce on its prey. Once his eyes found Harry's wand, they never left. The

wand that saved all their lives; the man who kept them safe. “Nymphadora, how were wards put up around this house without us finding out?”

“I didn’t know Harry had that done, daddy,” Tonks answered looking to her boyfriend. “Harry, could you answer that question for us? You told me you didn’t know where my parents lived.”

Harry stilled and his body relaxed before he opened his eyes. The bright green intensity flowed over everyone settling on Tonks. A small smile with a hint of a lopsided smirk showed itself. “I didn’t know, but other people did. I simply asked Ragnok to put up the best wards available for your family. I believe he gave me a group rate or something after Hermione’s.”

“Ragnok?” Andromeda said in a puzzled fashion.

“Director Ragnok?” Ted breathed slowly watching Harry’s smirk deepen before he closed his eyes again without saying a word.

“You could have told me, honey,” Tonks whined showing her disappointment with being kept in the dark. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Harry’s smile appeared but his eyes remained closed. “You put one over on me, so we are even now.”

“You insufferable sneak,” Tonks yelled as she pointed in Harry’s direction. “Never let me get one up on you. This isn’t fair. I was always the crafty one until I met you. Since then it has been a shoulder check here, sexual innuendo there, and a full set of professional wards secretly erected around my parent’s house.”

Harry didn’t reply but tilted his head as if learning about his actions for the first time. “My baby has finally been bested,” Andromeda muttered sneaking in a one-armed hug of her daughter. “Thank Merlin it was for a good purpose at least and not a wasted effort on a practical joke.”

By the time Harry and Tonks left, everyone’s spirits were higher. Harry was sent away with a motherly hug and a firm handshake and

a pair of requests to keep Tonks safe. Tonks complaints about being able to take care of herself were ignored by her parents.

"You can never have enough people looking out for your baby," Andromeda countered her daughter. "Be safe and look out for each other."

Harry and Tonks left the home again taking extra precautions with their exit and trip home. Multiple Apparitions were made to avoid being followed by any Death Eaters who had left and returned to the Tonks's home. When they finally arrived home, Harry led Tonks to bed where they comforted each other until sleep took them.

The early afternoon trip the next day to meet with Horace was uneventful. They Apparated into the team room and walked to Horace's office to find him casually smoking a cigar that emitted a soft blue smoke which seemed to travel in its own air current separate from the room's. After a very long pull and exhale, Horace motioned to the chairs in front of his desk. All seated, Horace spoke. "We need to figure out a way for you to participate in missions, with your team, while you are incarcerated in that castle. Any suggestions that aren't stupid?"

Harry thought of all the ways he could sneak out of the school and presented that as an option. "There are passageways out of the school. I can use them to come and go as needed, or I can fly out of my dorm room window on my broom."

Horace remained watchful and quiet as he looked to Tonks for other ideas. Receiving none, he looked back to Harry. "Both are workable, but require you to change locations, avoid detection, and possibly rely on others for cover. As I see it, those should be options two on down. Why not a portkey?"

Harry had considered it but knew enough about their limitations. "None of us are keyed into the wards so Dumbledore would have to make it or at least aid in the creation of it." Harry watched Horace smile and puff on his cigar once more.

"Glad to see you understand your next mission, Potter," Horace smirked. He removed a heavy gold chain from one of his desk

drawers and tossed it to Harry. The chain had a device at the end of it with a moveable dial that produced a soft click when turned. "It is a reusable Portkey vessel. It is a recent design from Research and they hope it works in the field like it is supposed to." Horace leaned forward drawing another deep puff. "Hello, guinea pig."

Under his breath, Harry mumbled, "Bloody brilliant."

Horace overheard him and barked out, "Glad to hear you are all for it. It is similar to a Time Turner which is..."

"I know about them," Harry offered examining the device closely.

"Really?" Horace asked leaning back and thinking. "Oh, of course. The Time Turner Granger had a few years ago. No doubt you caused endless amounts of trouble with it. No matter, you enchant the device with the destinations of the portkey just like any other. You simply need to add an additional incantation after you are finished. 'Acceditus'. Then you need the person who can grant the access, in this case Dumbledore, tap the device and say, 'Licet Licere Licuit'. At that point, the portkey will function as you spelled it to. Any changes made to the destinations will require the permissions to be re-added."

"Will Dumbledore know what is going on if I ask him to do this?" Harry questioned while tightly holding onto the portkey.

"He will know that he is granting you or rather your device permission to do what it is spelled to do," Horace explained. "Most likely, he will make the leap of faith and figure it is a portkey. He will not know when it is activated or used though. The only other option I can think of aside from those discussed would be to have him key you into the wards themselves. I know the old man well enough to know that really isn't an option so this is the best I can come up with."

"Do you know how hard it is going to be to get him to do this portkey thing?" Harry asked openly surprised at it even being suggested in the first place. "He didn't even want me away from my relatives this summer. What makes you think he will let me leave school when I want to?"

Horace's face grew firm and forceful, "If I ever give you easy assignments there are only two reasons. One, I got nothing better, or two, you are too incompetent for anything more. You are a bright and resourceful Operative; you will figure it out or fail miserably. Either way, it isn't me running around and dodging school teachers just to make it here on time. Your problem, you fix it." Horace took his last puff on the cigar and extinguished it in an ashtray on the edge of his desk before waving his hand at it. "The last few days have been good for the department so I took a liberty I reserve for special occasions. Now, take the trinket and get cracking on your assignment. I expect you to have resolved your transportation difficulties in two weeks. We will alter Team Three's training schedule to at least give the impression of accommodating yours."

The pair left the office together and returned to the team room. Harry took a minute to look at the portkey and ponder his situation. "Wouldn't be my life if it wasn't hard. Oh well, on to Gringotts I guess."

They Apparated to Diagon Alley where Harry was noticed and followed by the rabid reporters all the way to the doors of Gringotts snapping off pictures as they went. At one point, a photographer stepped on Tonks' cloak and nearly tripped her up. In an attempt to keep her upright, Harry spun them around and 'accidentally' knocked the man over and into a barrel of dragon dung outside the Apothecary.

The security forces at the entrance of the bank stopped further pursuit of the couple. Harry asked and was granted access to a meeting room as fast as the goblins could manage. Ragnok arrived minutes later and Harry began a discussion with him about the companies he owned and had voting authority with. In a few tactical moves and with a few signatures, Harry granted his voting rights to Tonks for the duration of the school year. She was surprised by how easily he signed the papers that essentially empowered her to direct a handful of companies in what ever way she wanted.

Tonks promised to consult with Harry about how he wanted her to vote on things, but he only gave her a few guidelines that consisted mostly of things she would have done anyway. When they arrived home in the early evening, they were greeted by happy elves with dinner ready and waiting.

The night before Harry was to return to Hogwarts he planned a special evening for Tonks. With the help of Dobby and Tiki, a meal was prepared with all of Tonks' favorite foods. Hedwig had spent a couple nights ferrying letters back and forth between Harry and Andromeda containing the foods she loved when growing up. To get her out of the house so the elves could make the food, Harry took Tonks for a drive in the countryside.

After a few teaching points presented themselves, Tonks complimented Harry on his driving and disaster avoidance. With the sun hanging low in the horizon, Harry returned home parking the auto in the garage. He managed to get ahead of Tonks and slowed her up enough to give the elves time to finish arranging everything. After a little snogging against the Jaguar, Harry walked Tonks into the house and towards the dining room.

She scanned the table and recognized the dishes waiting to be consumed. She turned and kissed Harry more forcefully than she had in the garage. "And should I thank my mother as well?"

"She might have had a hand in this, but I hope you don't kiss her like that as well." Harry couldn't help but smile when he saw how happy Tonks looked. She bounded over to a chair and plopped down as if she was eight years old. She looked around the table and started to reach for a nearby bowl before stopping herself.

"Harry, get over here and join me. I won't wait forever and I want to eat." The happiness would have been unmistakable to anyone.

Harry sat in a seat next to her and she attacked the food instantly. The meal was relatively quiet but Tonks kept her left hand on Harry's right leg for as much of the meal as she could. The looks exchanged between the two told the elves to stay on the ground floor for the evening. Once Harry had finished eating, they left the room and walked up stairs. Tonks pulled on his hand trying to guide him into their room, but he resisted by urging her into the library.

Confused, Tonks followed along hoping that she wasn't going to spend the night watching Harry read some old books. Pleasantly, she was led across the room and up the stairs through the training room, map room, and owlery. "I may need to send my mum a thank you, but

I wasn't planning on doing it now, Harry." Tonks made it clear she was confused and not wanting to waste any more time. She leaned against Harry and kissed him firmly while her left hand began tugging at his clothes.

"One flight left," Harry told her between heated kisses. Tonks understood and climbed to the roof to find a soft mat laid out complete with a blanket and pillows. The warmth of the day still hung in the air as the sun faded in the west. Tonks looked up and saw the stars beginning to appear. "Oh, did you think this up all by yourself?"

Harry wrapped his arms around her and began kissing her neck and lips slowly. "If I didn't, does it really matter?"

"Not at all," Tonks breathed as she pulled Harry down with her and onto the blanket. They made quick work of removing their clothes and soon began to enjoy being alone on the top of the tower together. Harry was determined to show how much he cared about Tonks on the last night they had together before things became more complicated with school and everything else. The moments stretched on as Harry continued to kiss and touch Tonks. His hands were redirected as she wanted with words or fevered nudges.

It was a star-filled sky overhead that Harry found when they had finally collapsed after their efforts. He lay on his back and looked up as Tonks curled into him and ran her soft hands over his chest. A shooting star flared above him as Tonks cooed and burrowed her head into his shoulder and neck.

"Thank you for such a wonderful night, Harry," called the muffled voice of Tonks. "I had planned on shagging you, but didn't think you needed the wine-and-dine beforehand."

Harry chuckled and returned the favour by running his finger tips down her back slowly. She reacted as he had hoped with shivers and small bumps in the wake of his touch. "Perhaps that was another part of the evening that I didn't do by myself. I hope you don't mind though. I never claimed to be that romantic or gifted with wooing women."

Wet and puffy lips met his in answer joined shortly after by a warm tongue seeking attention. "You do alright and if you get advice from

others, I can live that.” Their gentle actions continued as the night drifted on. After a lull in activities, Tonks murmured, “What a beautiful night. Thank you, Harry, for such a wonderful summer. It has been the most pleasant one I have ever had.”

“That makes the two of us,” Harry admitted. “You made it all happen, you know. You showed me that I could do it, that I could take control of my life. If you hadn’t been there, I really have no idea what would have happened in the last couple months. Most likely, I would have cursed my relatives and been kicked out of school or locked away in Grimmauld Place. I can’t even begin to say thank you for everything. I, I don’t what else to say or where to begin.”

Tonks smiled and ran her hand along his face. “How about where we left off, sexy?”

“Love you,” Harry breathed out.

“Love you too, Harry.”

When Tonks woke up, she found the blanket covering them and shielding them from the chill of the moist early morning. Unable to stifle her laugh, Tonks ended up nudged Harry awake with her laughs. “Time to get up, Harry. We have to get you ready for the train.”

Harry scowled without opening his eyes. “Oh, just a few more minutes, Nymph. Please?” Harry pulled her close and hugged her naked form to him reveling in the feel of the woman.

“No need to make a big production of it, Harry, just Apparate us to our room.” Tonks held on as Harry sighed and focused his mind on carrying out the task. In a few seconds, Tonks felt the bed under them and the cool air disappear. “Thank you, baby.”

“Few more minutes then?” Harry begged as he tried to curl into her.

“Fine, but the elves know when you have to be there,” Tonks offered. “Don’t blame me when they wake you up.”

No more than an hour later, Dobby bounded into the room and shook Harry awake apologizing the entire time for disturbing him. After a

quick shower, Harry stumbled his way to the kitchen not feeling any more awake than he did when Dobby pulled on his hand to rouse him. Tonks laughed and helped Harry eat his breakfast. Most of the packing was done by Tiki who felt left out of the whole process since Tonks was going to spend her time between Potter Estate, her parent's, and her own flat during the school year.

With his stuff shrunk and pocketed, Harry and Tonks Apparated to an alley a few blocks away from King's Cross and walked the rest of the way in to the busy hub. The crowds buffeted them as they made their way to Platform 9 and 10. Harry saw a few people he knew, but the sheer volume of people prevented any real conversation from taking place. Harry and Tonks hurried through the barrier when they reached it and were met by an almost equally busy platform filled with witches and wizards running about and the Hogwarts Express which was emitting puff of steam every now and then.

They dodged around families wishing their best to the students leaving them for a few months and the added security who patrolled around the periphery. Teams of aurors were stationed on the platform and most had their wands exposed and ready to strike should something happen. Harry thought he caught sight of Horace amongst the throngs but was never sure as they made their way across the platform.

The Weasleys and Grangers were easy to spot by either their hair or the simple number of them standing in one place. Harry and Tonks joined the group near one end of the platform and greetings were shared by all.

"Harry," Molly observed, "you look tired. Did you sleep at all?"

"Not really," Harry answered accompanied by a long yawn.

"Did you have bad dreams?" The protective mother asked.

"No," Harry said before thinking. He looked up and saw Molly wearing a concerned look on her face, but her children wore completely different expressions. Ginny and Hermione eyed him carefully smiling widely. Ron was unconcerned, but the twins shared their time looking at Harry, Tonks, and their mum equally. "Uh, no bad dreams just had

problems sleeping.” He knew his cover story was weak, but it was the best he could do in the time frame he had subjected himself to.

“Really?” Fred asked with a smirk.

“My, Tonks, you look like you had problems sleeping as well,” George pointed out.

Never one to leave a tentative situation alone, Tonks played along. “Yes, getting to sleep took forever,” Tonks drew out. “But once I fell asleep, I stayed asleep. Must have been the exhaustion...”

Harry stopped the conversation by forcing a cough and pointing out the time which had advanced on them. Harry figured it was from the ‘goodbye’ Tonks insisted on giving him before they left the house. “Well, we should be getting on the train and finding a place to stay.”

The twins laughed along with Ginny while Hermione shook her head and hugged her parents goodbye. Before Harry could groan about how much ribbing he was in for from Ginny, Tonks had spun him around and planted a large kiss on his lips. Harry reacted like he had many times before and kissed her back as passionately as he could running his hands along her back. The whoops and giggles from behind him never registered as the only thing on his mind was Tonks and what her tongue was doing. Harry hadn’t noticed before, but he could feel through the cloak that Tonks had only changed her face and hair colour for their trip to the train. The rest of her body was its normal size and shape and his mind was replaying the images of what those things looked like.

When the kiss ended, Harry looked deeply into her eyes. “As we planned once I get the portkey set up, we will meet up a few times a week. Until then, I will message you when I can escape. Oh, and I have a standing date for every Hogsmeade weekend right?”

Tonks smirked and ignored the stares she was receiving from parents and the coworkers of hers who had seen her and Harry kiss. “As long as you don’t have detention, I will be there.” She leaned in and whispered in his ear, “Wearing a cloak and nothing else.” She leaned back and smiled her most impish smile, “If that is what you want of course.”

Harry mumbled unintelligible words for a few seconds before giving up and nodding to her.

“Oh, and I won that round, Harry,” Tonks said quickly before Harry could speak.

Thoughts and images still rolling in his head, Harry turned around to enter the train and was met by Draco Malfoy strolling down the stairs. “What a disgusting show of filth. I knew Potter was desperate, but I never figured he would stoop so low as the disowned whore of our family.”

Tonks laughed once and watched Harry react instantly. The Boy-Who-Lived inclined his head and stepped toward Malfoy. His right hand was already moving towards its target, but at the last second Harry pulled his hand in and led with his elbow driven by his entire shoulder. Years of getting hit by Dudley and trying to fight back showed him that punching someone hurt more than elbowing them. The tip of Harry’s elbow connected with the side of Draco’s jaw and dropped the pompous arse in less than a second.

Draco fell back and crashed onto the stairs with a whimper and a soft crack. The proud and arrogant berk slowly slid down the stairs before coming to rest in a heap on the platform at the foot of the stairs. Harry stepped up and said to a groggy Draco, “Do not insult Tonks again, Malfoy. Next time, I won’t hold back.”

Harry turned to face Tonks and saw a fuming Narcissa Malfoy making her way through the sparse crowd between them. She drew even and made her threats. “The press might like to hear about the Golden Boy striking another child. Labels like unstable and violent would sell a lot of papers and tarnish your sparkling clean name.”

Harry took the challenge to heart and knew what to say to shut the woman up before more than a few students noticed the incident. “Maybe so, but all I have to do is yell Death Eater and point and the aurors will have you under arrest before you can draw your wand to escape. Then they will pull up your sleeve.” Harry hesitated as his words sunk in. “I wonder what they find? Maybe I should check your son for the Dark Mark as well. That would make the rounds at Hogwarts pretty fast wouldn’t it? I am sure the paper would enjoy

seeing such an upstanding pureblood family as yours exposed as the murderous lackeys that you are.”

Harry waited to see what would happen. Narcissa looked around noticing that many of the aurors were paying extra attention to Harry and his friends. They seemed to be watching and waiting before acting on anything. The proud woman lifted her head and stared Harry in the eyes. “I hear that my sister met an unfortunate end recently. Do you know anything about it?”

Harry shrugged, “I heard that she walked down the wrong alley and ran into someone who owed her for something. Very tragic, wouldn’t you agree?” Harry held her gaze unwilling to let go.

“My sister always had a problem of going too far,” Narcissa probed. “Maybe she went too far one too many times.”

Harry allowed his stare to become a glare and let his emotions show. “Oh, I believe she did go too far. One should be careful who they threaten. Everyone has allies in this war, and you never know if their allies are better than yours.” Harry watched for a response and got one when Narcissa looked away and down at her slowly recovering son.

“Do be careful, boy,” Narcissa attempted to intimidate Harry and failed. “You always seem to find yourself in trouble every school year. I hear this year is going to be more treacherous than others too.”

Harry took the comment in stride. “It is nothing new to me. Do give Voldemort my worst. I hope he has a dreadful year as well.”

Narcissa flinched before leaving Harry and his friends. Harry hugged Tonks tightly and kissed her deeply one more time. The four returning students climbed onto the train, stepping over Draco who was trying to shake away the fog, and searched out an empty carriage. When they found one, Harry settled into a seat and looked out to see Tonks staring back at him.

“Harry,” Hermione asked, “why did you hit him? He didn’t said anything that he hasn’t already said to us.”

“True,” Harry answered looking into Tonks’ eyes seeing the longing already building in them. “But he needed to know that this year is going to be different. I will not shy away from a fight. I will take it to him if he thinks that he can threaten my friends and get away with it. I told Voldemort the same basic thing the other night. I am not afraid of the fight. I will protect my friends, and I am not going to play fair when doing so.”

As the train pulled away, Harry smiled at Tonks before she disappeared from sight. He turned and looked at his friends who looked surprisingly determined. “This is my life and I am going to do what I can to live it. If a few Death Eaters or Death Eaters in-training get hurt, so be it. Those I love and care about will live on if I have anything to say about it.”

Nothing was said for a few minutes as the houses, stations, and buildings flew past the windows in a blur before Ron broke the tension. “That is great and all, mate, but do you want to play chess or not?”